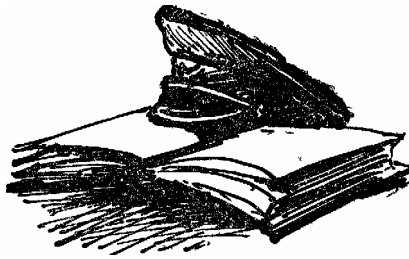


LEV KASSIL

THE BLACK BOOK
AND

SCHWAMBRANIA



PROGRESS PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW

THE BLACK BOOK AND SCHWAMBRANIA

A story of THE UNUSUAL ADVENTURES OF TWO KNIGHTS

In Search of Justice

Who Discovered

THE GREAT SCHWAMBRANIAN NATION

On the Big Tooth Continent,

With a description

Of the amazing events

That took place

On the Wandering Islands,

And also many other things,

As told by

ADELAR CASE,

FORMER ADMIRAL

OF SCHWAMBRANIA,

Who now goes by the name of

LEV KASSIL,

And including a great number

Of secret documents, sea charts,

The Coat of Arms and the flag

Translated from the Russian by Fainna Glagoleva

Designed by Victor Kirillov

Л. Кассиль

КОНДУИТ И ШВАМБРАНИЯ

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PART ONE

THE BLACK BOOK

A LAND OF VOLCANIC ORIGIN

DISCOVERY

On the evening of October 11, 1492, the 68th day of his voyage, Christopher Columbus noticed a moving light on the horizon. Columbus followed the light and discovered America.

On the evening of February 8, 1914, my brother and I, having been punished, were sitting in the corner. After twelve minutes of this he was pardoned, as being the younger, but refused to leave me until my sentence was up and so stayed put. For a while we were engrossed in picking our noses. On the 4th minute, when we tired of this, we discovered Schwambrania.



THE LOST QUEEN, OR THE MYSTERY OF THE

SEASHELL GROTTO

The disappearance of the queen brought everything to a head. This happened in broad daylight, and the light of day dimmed. It was Papa's queen, and that was what made everything so terrible. Papa was a great chess fan, and everyone knows what an important figure the queen is on the chessboard.

The lost queen was part of a new set made to order especially for Papa, who was very proud of it.

We were not to touch the figures for anything, yet it was impossible to keep our hands off them.

The lovely lacquered pieces fired our imaginations, prompting us to invent any number of exciting games for them. Thus, the pawns could either be soldiers or tenpins. There were small circles of felt pasted on their round soles, and so they slid around like floor polishers. The rooks were good wine glasses, while the kings could either be samovars or generals. The round knobs that crowned the bishops were like light bulbs. We could harness a pair of black and a pair of white horses to cardboard cabs and line them up to wait for fares, or else we could arrange them so that they formed a merry-go-round. However, the queens were the best of all. One queen was a blonde and the other was a brunette. Either one could be a Christmas tree, a cabby, a Chinese pagoda, a flower pot on a stand or a priest. Indeed, it was impossible to keep our hands off them.

On that memorable day the white cabby-queen's black horse was taking the black priest-queen to see the black general-king. He received the priest-queen most nobly. He set the white samovar-king on the table, told the pawns to polish the chequered parquet floor and turned on the electric light-bishops. Then the king and queen each had two rookfuls of tea.

When at last the samovar-king cooled off and we became tired of our game, we decided to put the figures back in their case. Horrors! The black queen was missing!

We bruised our knees crawling about, looking under the chairs, the tables and the bookcases. All our efforts were in vain. The wretched queen was gone. Vanished! We finally had to tell Mamma, who soon had everyone up in arms. No matter how hard we all looked, we could not find it. A terrible storm was about to break over our cropped heads. Then Papa came home.

This was no measly storm. A blizzard, a hurricane, a cyclone, a simoom, a waterspout and a typhoon came crashing down upon us! Papa was furious. He called us vandals and barbarians. He said that one could even teach a wild bear to handle things carefully, and all we knew how to do was wreck everything we touched, and he would not stand for such destructiveness and vandalism.

"Into the corner, both of you! And stay there!" he shouted. "Vandals!"

We looked at each other and burst into tears.

"If I'd have known I was going to have such a Papa, I'd never get borned!" Oska bawled.

Mamma blinked hard. She was about to shed a tear, but that did not soften Papa's heart. We stumbled off to the "medicine chest". For some reason or other that was the name given to the dim storeroom near the bathroom and the kitchen. There were always dusty jars and bottles on the small window-sill, which is probably how the room originally got its name.

There was a small low bench in one corner known as "the dock". Papa, who was a doctor, felt it was wrong to have children stand in the corner when they were punished and so had us sit in the corner instead.

There we were, banished to that shameful bench. The medicine chest was as dim as a dungeon. Oska said:

"He meant the circus, didn't he? I mean, the part about bears being so careful. Didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Are vandals part of the circus, too?"

"Vandals are robbers," I muttered.

"That's what I thought." He sounded pleased. "They have chains tied on them."

Annushka, our cook, stuck her head out of the kitchen and threw up her hands.

"Goodness! The master's lost his toy and so the babies have to sit here in the dark. My poor little sinners! Do you want me to bring you the cat to play with?"

"No!" I growled. The resentment which had gradually died down now welled up in me again.

As the unhappy day drew to a close the dim room became darker still. The Earth was turning its back on the Sun. The world, too, turned its back on us. We looked out upon the unjust world from our place of shame. The world was very large, as I had learned in geography, but there was no place for children in it. Grown-ups were in charge of everything on all five continents. They changed the course of history, rode horses, hunted, sailed ships, smoked, made real things, went off to war, fell in love, saved people, kidnapped people and played chess. But their children were made to stand in corners. The grown-ups had probably forgotten the games they had played as children and the books they had found so interesting. Indeed, they had probably forgotten all about that part of their lives. Otherwise they would have let us play with whomever we wanted to, climb fences, wade through puddles and pretend that a chessman called a king was a boiling samovar.

That was what we were thinking about as we sat in the corner.

"Let's run away! We'll gallop off!" Oska said.

"Go ahead, what's keeping you? But where'll you go? Everyplace you go there'll be grown-ups, and you're just a little boy."

At that moment I had a brainstorm. It cut through the gloom like a bolt of lightning, so that I was not at all surprised to hear the roll of thunder that followed (actually, Annushka had dropped the roasting pan).

There was no need to run away, to search for a promised land. It was here, somewhere very close at hand. We had only to invent it. I could practically see it in the gloom. There, by the bathroom door, were its palm trees, ships, palaces and mountains.

"There's land ahead, Oska!" I shouted excitedly. "Land! It's a new game we can play all our lives!"

Oska's one thought was a good future ahead. "I'll blow the whistle, and I'll be the engineer!" he said. "What'll we play?"

"It's going to be a game about a land, our own land. We'll live in it every day, besides living here, and it'll belong to us. Left paddle ahead!"

"Aye, aye, Sir! Left paddle ahead! Whoooo!"

"Slow speed. Pay out the mooring line."

"Shhh," Oska hissed, letting off steam.

We disembarked from our bench onto a new shore.

"What's it called?"

At the time of the events described, our favourite book was *Greek Myths* by Gustav Schwab, and so we decided to name our new land Schwabrania. However, the word sounded too much like the cotton swabs Papa used in his practice, so we added an "m", making our new land Schwambrania. We were now Schwambranians. All of the above was to be kept a deep dark secret.

Mamma soon let us out of our dungeon. She had no way of knowing that she was now dealing with two citizens of a great nation known as Schwambrania.

A week later the black queen surfaced. The cat had rolled it into a crack under the trunk. However, Papa had by then ordered a new queen,- and so this queen was ours. We decided to make it the keeper of the secret of Schwambrania.

Mamma had a beautiful little grotto made of seashells that she had put away behind the mirror of her dressing table and had forgotten all about. A pair of tiny filigree brass gates guarded the entrance to the cosy cave. The cave was empty. We decided to hide our queen there.

We wrote "C.W.S." (Code Words of Schwambrania) on a slip of paper, pulled away an edge of the felt circle on the bottom of the black queen and stuck the paper into the space. Then we put the queen in the cave and sealed the gates with sealing-wax. The queen was now doomed to eternal imprisonment. I will tell you

of what happened to it later.

A BELATED INTRODUCTION

Schwambrania was a land of volcanic origin.

Red-hot growing forces boiled and bubbled within us. They were held in check by the stiff, rock-bound structure of our family and of the society in which we lived.

There was so much we wanted to know and still more that we wanted to learn how to do. But our teachers would only let us know as much as could be found in our schoolbooks and in silly children's stories, and we did not really know how to do anything, because we had never been taught to.

We wanted to be a part of the adult world, but we were told to go and play with our tin soldiers if we didn't want to get into trouble with our parents, teachers or the police.

There were many people in our town. They hurried up and down the streets and often came into our yard, but we were only allowed to associate with the people our elders approved of.

My brother and I played Schwambrania for several years. It became our second country and was a mighty nation. The Revolution, that stern teacher and excellent educator, helped us to overcome our old ties, and we finally abandoned the tinfoil ruins of Schwambrania forever.

I have saved our "Schwambranian letters" and maps, the plans of our military campaigns and sketches of the flag and coat-of-arms. I have referred to them to freshen my recollections while writing this book. It is the story of Schwambrania, with tales about the travels of many Schwambranians and our own adventures there, as well as many other events.

GEOGRAPHY

"But the earth still turns—if you
don't believe me, sit on your
very own buttocks—and
slide!"

Mayakovsky

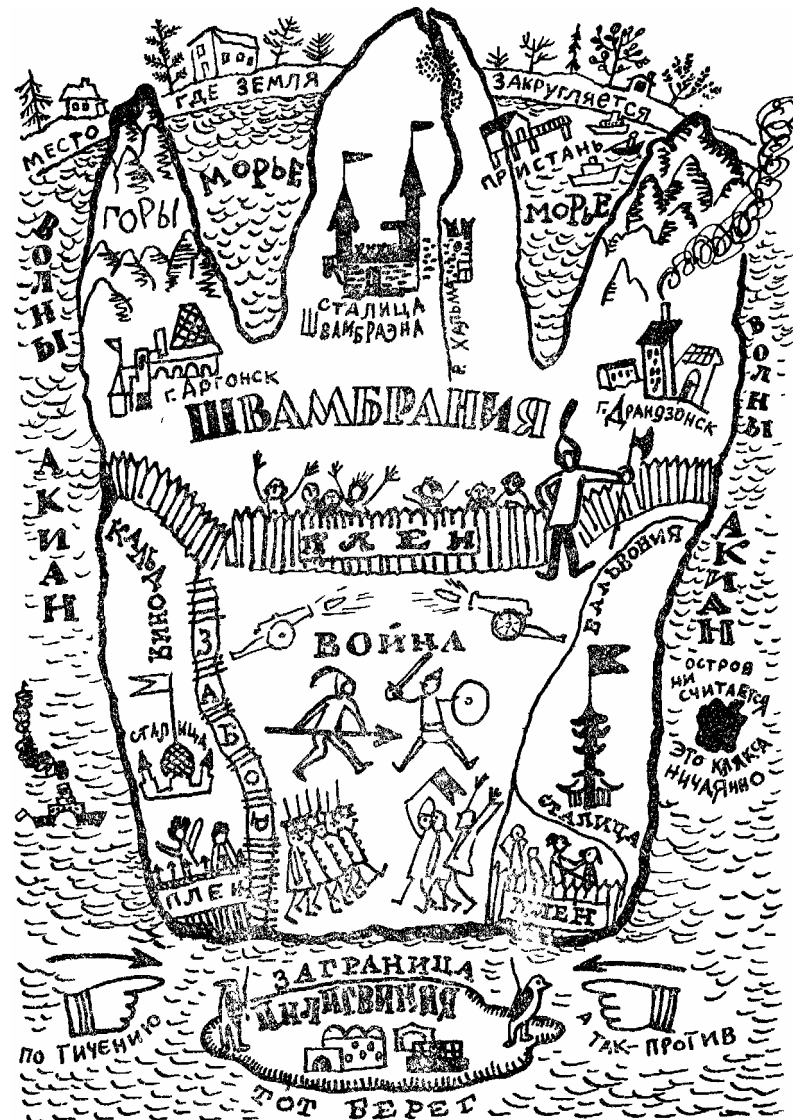
Just like any other country, Schwambrania had a terrain, a climate, flora, fauna and population all its own.

Oska made the first map of Schwambrania. He copied a large molar tooth from a dentist's ad he had seen, and since it had three roots it at once resembled a tulip, the crown of the Nibelungs and an upside-down "M", the letter we had added to the middle of the name of our new country. It was very tempting to see some special meaning in this and we did: we decided it was a wisdom tooth, signifying the wisdom of the Schwambranians. Thus, the new country's contours resembled a wisdom tooth. The surrounding ocean was dotted with islands and blots, but I must say that the ink-spots were truthfully marked as such: "Not an iland, an erer". The ocean was marked "Oshen". Oska drew wavy lines and inscribed them "waves". Then he marked the "see" and added two arrows, one pointing out the "curant" and the other "this way is aposit". There was also a "beech", a straight-coursing river named the Halma, the capital city of Schwambraena, the towns of Argonsk and Drandzonsk, Foren Shore Bay, "that side", a "peer", mountains and, finally, "the place where the Earth curves".

At the time Oska was very much concerned about the spherical nature of the ground underfoot and did his best to prove the roundness of the Earth to himself. Luckily, we knew nothing of Mayakovsky's poetry, for Oska's pants certainly would have been worn thin in his efforts to see if he could slide on it. However, he discovered another way of proving it. Before putting the finishing touches to his map of Schwambrania, he led me out of our yard with a very meaningful look on his face. Beyond the granaries and near the main square the remains of a mound could be seen. Perhaps this had once been a part of some earthen foundation for a chapel, or perhaps it had once been a large flower bed. Time had all but levelled the little hump. Oska beamed as he led me to it. He pointed grandly and said:

"Here's the place where the Earth curves."

I dared not contradict him. Perhaps the Earth did curve there. At any rate, in order not to lose face, for he was my baby brother after all, I said: "Ha! That's nothing! You should have seen that place in Saratov. That's where the Earth re curves."



Schwambrania was a truly symmetrical land, one that could easily serve an example for any ornament. To the West were mountains, a city and the sea. To East were mountains, a city and the sea. There was a bay on the left and a bay the right. This symmetry reflected the true justice which governed Schwambrania and the rules of our game. Unlike ordinary books, where good prevails and evil is vanquished on the very last page, ours was a land where the heroes were rewarded and the villains defeated at the very start. Ours was a country of complete well-being and exquisite perfection. There was not even a jagged line in its contour.

Symmetry is a balance of lines, a linear system of justice. Schwambrania was a land of true justice, where all the good things in life and even the terrain were fairly distributed. There was a bay on the left and a bay on the right, the city of Drandzonsk in the West and the city of Argonsk in the East. Justice reigned.

HISTORY

Now, as was only proper for a real nation, Schwambrania had to have a history all its own. Six months of our playing the game covered several centuries of its existence.

As I learned from my reading, the past history of any self-respecting country was crammed full of wars. That was why Schwambrania had to work hard to catch up. However, there was no one it could fight. That was why we had to draw two curved lines across the bottom of the Big Tooth Continent and write "Fence" along one of them. We now had two enemy nations in the two marked-off comers. One was "Caldonia", a combination of "cad" and "Caledonia", and the other was "Balvonian", a combination of "bad" and "Bolivia". The *level ground* situated between Caldonia and Balvonian was there to serve as a battle-field. It was marked "War" on the map.

We were soon to see the same word in large block letters in the newspapers.

We imagined that all real battles took place in a special hard-packed, cleanly-swept square area like a parade ground. The Earth never curved here, for the ground was level and smooth.

"The war place is paved like a sidewalk," I said knowingly to my brother.

"Is there a Volga in a war?" he wanted to know. He thought that the Volga meant any river.

To both sides of the "War" part on the map were the places for the prisoners of war. The three areas were clearly marked "prizon".

All wars in Schwambrania began with the postman ringing the front doorbell of the Emperor's palace. He would say:

"There's a special delivery for you, Your Majesty. Sign here."

"I wonder who it's from?" the Emperor would say, licking the tip of his pencil.

Oska was the postman. I was the Emperor.

"I think I know that handwriting," the postman would reply. "It looks like it's from Balvonian. From their king."

"Any letters from Caldonia?" the Emperor would ask.

"They're still writing," the postman would answer, mimicking to perfection the reply of our postman, Neboga, for that was what he would say whenever we asked if there were any letters for us.

"Lend me a hairpin, Queen!" the Emperor would shout and would then slit open the envelope with a hairpin. A letter might read:

"Dear Mr. King of Schwambrania,

"How are you? We are fine, thank God. Yesterday we had a bad earthquake

and three volcanoes erupted. Then there was a terrible fire in the palace and a terrible flood. Last week we had a war against Caldonia. But we licked them and captured all of them. Because the Balvonians are all very brave heroes. And all the Schwambranians are fools, idiots, dunderheads and vandals. And we want to fight you. God willing, we present you with a manifesto in the newspapers. Come on out and fight a War. We'll lick you all and capture you, too. If you don't fight a War, you're all scaredy-cats and sissies. And we despise you. You're all a bunch of idiots.

"Regards to your missus the Queen and to the young man who's the heir. "Wherewith is the print of mine own boot.

"The King of Balvonian"

Upon reading such a letter, the Emperor would become very angry. He would take his sword down from the wall and summon his knife-grinders. He would then send the Balvoniancad a telegram with a "paid reply". The message would read:

"I MARCH ON YOU."

According to my History of Russia textbook, either Prince Yaroslav or Prince Svyatoslav of yore had sent his enemies a similar warning. The Prince would telegraph this message to some warrior tribe of Pechenegs or Polovtsi and would then ride off to settle their hash. However, it would never do to address such an impertinent fellow as the King of Balvonian politely, and that was why the Emperor of Schwambrania would angrily add "rat": "I March on you, rat!" Then the Emperor would summon the supplier of medicine to His Majesty's court, whose official title was Physician Extraordinary, and get himself called up.

"And how are we today?" the Physician Extraordinary would inquire. "How's our stomach? Uh ... how's our stool, I mean throne, today? Breathe deeply, please."

Then the Emperor would get into his coach and say: "Come on, fellow! Don't spare the horses!"

And he would go off to war. Everyone would cheer and salute, while his queen waved a clean hankie from her window.

Naturally, Schwambrania won all its wars. Balvonian was defeated and annexed. But no sooner were the "war parade grounds" swept clean and the "prizon" places aired than Caldonia would declare war on Schwambrania. It would also be defeated. A hole was made in the fortress wall, and from then on the Schwambranians could go to Caldonia without paying the fare, every day except Sundays.

There was a special place on "that side" for "Foren Land". That was where the

nasty Piliguins lived. They roamed the icy wastes and were something of a cross between pilgrims and penguins. The Schwambranians had met the Piliguins head-on on the war grounds on several occasions and had always defeated them. However, we did not annex their land, for then we would have had no one to fight. Thus, Piliguinia was set aside for future historic developments.

FROM POKROVSK TO DRANDZONSK

When in Schwambrania, we lived on the main street of Drandzonsk, on the 1,001st floor of a diamond house. When in Russia we lived in the town of Pokrovsk on the Volga River, opposite the city of Saratov. We lived on the first floor of a house on Market Square.

The screeching voices of the women vendors burst in through the open windows. The pungent dregs of the market were piled high on the square. The unharnessed horses chomped loudly, and their feed-bags jerked and bobbed. Wagons raised their shafts heavenwards, imploringly. There were eatables, junk, groceries, greens, dry goods, embroideries and hot food rows. Thin-rind watermelons were stacked in pyramids like cannon-balls in the movie *The Defence of Sevastopol*.

This was the film then being shown at the Eldorado, the electric cinematographic theatre around the corner. There were always goats outside. Regular herds of goats crowded around to munch on the playbills which were pasted to the billboards with flour-paste.

Breshka Street led from the Eldorado to our house. People used to promenade here in the evenings. The street was only two blocks long, and so the strollers would jostle each other as they walked back and forth for hours on end, from one corner to another, like tiny waves in a bathtub splashing first against one side and then another. The girls from the outlying farms walked down the middle of the street. They seemed to be sailing along unhurriedly, swaying slightly as they walked, like the floating watermelon rinds hitting the Volga piers. The dry, staccato sound of roasted sunflower seeds being cracked floated above the crowd. The sidewalks were black from discarded sunflower shells. The roasted seeds were known locally as "Pokrovsk conversation".

Standing on the sidelines were young fellows wearing rubber galoshes over their boots. They would flick away a garland of empty seed shells stuck to their lip with a magnificent movement of a pinky. A young man would address a girl with true politesse: "Mind if I latch on? How's about telling us your name? What is it? Marusya? Katya?"

"Go on! Doesn't he think he's something!" the girl would scoff. "Oh, well,

what the heck, you might as well walk along."

All evening long the babbling, sunflower seed-cracking crowd of country boys and girls would stomp up and down in front of our windows.

We would sit on the windowsill in the dark parlour, looking out at the darkening street. As busy Breshka Street floated by us, invisible palaces and castles rose on the windowsill and palm fronds waved, and cannonade we two alone could hear resounded all around us. The destructive shrapnel of our imagination tore through the night. We were firing upon Breshka Street from our windowsill, which was Schwambrania.

We could hear the whistles of the river boats on the Volga. They came to us from the darkness of the night like streamers bridging the distance. Some were very high and vibrated like the coiled wire in bulb, while others were low and rumbling like a piano's bass string. A boat was attached to the other end of each streamer, lost in the dampness of the great river. We knew the entire ledger of these boat calls by heart, and could read the whistles and blasts like the lines of a book. Here was a velvety, majestic, high-rising and slowly descending "arrival" whistle of the *Rus*. A hoarse-voiced tug pulling a heavy barge scolded a rowboat. Two short, polite blasts followed. That was the *Samolyot* and the *Kavkaz-Mercury* approaching each other. We even knew that the *Samolyot* was heading upstream to Nizhny Novgorod, while the *Kavkaz-Mercury* was heading downstream to Astrakhan, since the *Mercury*, obeying the rules of river etiquette, was the first to say hello.

JACK, THE SAILOR'S COMPANION

Our world was a bay jam-packed with boats. Life was an endless journey, and each given day was a new voyage. It was quite natural, therefore, that every Schwambranian was a sailor. Each and every one had a boat tied up in his back yard. Jack, the Sailor's Companion, was far and away the most highly respected of all Schwambranians.

This great statesman came into being because of a small handbook entitled: *The Sailor's Pocket Companion and Dictionary of Most-Used Phrases*. We bought this dog-eared treasure at the market second-hand for five kopeks and endowed our new hero, Jack, the Sailor's Companion, with all the wisdom between its covers.

Since the handbook contained a vocabulary as well as a short section of sailing directions, Jack soon became a regular linguist, as he learned to speak German, English, French and Italian.

Speaking for Jack, I would read the vocabulary aloud, line after line. The result was most satisfying.

"Thunder, lightning, waterspout, typhoon!" Jack, the Sailor's Companion would say. "Donner, blitz, wasserhose! How do you do, sir or madame, good morning, bonjour. Do you speak any other language? Yes, I speak German and French. Good morning, evening. Goodbye, guten Morgen, Abend, adieu. I have come by boat, ship, on foot, on horseback; par mer, a pied, a cheval.... Man overboard. Un uomo in mare. What is the charge for saving him? Wie viel ist der bergelon?"

Sometimes Jack's imagination ran away with him, and I would blush for shame at his whopping lies.

"The pilot grounded us," Jack, the Sailor's Companion would say angrily on page 103, but would then confess in several languages (page 104): "I purposely ran aground to save the cargo."

We began our day in Pokrovsk with an arrival whistle while still in our beds. This meant we had returned from a night spent in Schwambrania. Annushka would watch the morning ritual patiently.

"Slow speed! Cast down the mooring rope!" Oska commanded after he had sounded his fog horn.

We cast off our blankets.

"Stop! Let down the gangplank!"

We swung our legs over the side of our beds.

"All off! We've arrived!"

"Good morning!"

A QUIET HAVEN

Our house was just another big boat. It had dropped anchor in the quiet harbour of Pokrovsk. Papa's consulting room was the bridge. No second class passengers, meaning us, were allowed there. The parlour was the first class deck house. The dining room was the mess. The terrace was the promenade deck. Annushka's room and the kitchen were the third class deck, the hold and the engine room. Second class passengers were not allowed in there, either. That was really a shame, because if there was ever any smoke in the house it came from there.

There smokestack was not a make-believe one, but a real one, and real flames roared in the furnace. Annushka, the stoker and the engineer, used real tools: a poker and scoop. The deck house bell rang insistently. The samovar whistled, signalling our departure. As the water in it bubbled over Annushka snatched it up and carried it off to the mess, holding it as far away from her body as possible. That was how babies were carried off when they had wet their diapers.

We were summoned up on deck and had to leave the engine room.

We always left the kitchen unwillingly, because this was the main porthole of our house, a window to the outside world, so to speak. The kind of people we had been told once and for all were not the kind we were to associate with were forever coming and going here. The people we were not to associate with were: ragmen, knife-grinders, delivery boys, plumbers, glaziers, postmen, firemen, organ-grinders, beggars, chimney-sweeps, janitors, the neighbours' cooks, coal men, gypsy fortune-tellers, carters, coopers, coachmen and wood-cutters. They were all third class passengers. And they were probably the best, the most interesting people in the world. But we were told that they were carriers of the most dreadful diseases and that their bodies swarmed with germs.



One day Oska said to Levonty Abramkin, the master garbage man, "Are you really swamping, I mean swaping, uh ... you know, full of measles bugs crawling all over you?"

"What's that?" Levonty sounded hurt. "These here are natural lice. There's no such animal as measles bugs. There's worms, but that's something you get in the stomach."

"Oh! Do you have worms swarming inside your stomach?" Oska cried excitedly.

This was the last straw. Levonty pulled on his cap and stalked out, slamming the door behind him.

The kitchen was a seat of learning. In Schwambrania the King sat enthroned in the kitchen and let anyone in who wanted to come. The neighbourhood children would come carolling there on Christmas Eve.

On New Year's Day our precinct policeman would call to pay his respects. He would click his heels and say:

"My respects."

He would be offered a glass of vodka brought out on a saucer, and a silver rouble. The policeman would take the rouble, offer his thanks and then drink to our health. Oska and I stared into his mouth. He would grunt and then stop breathing for a moment. He seemed to be listening to some inner process in his body, listening to the progress of the vodka, as it were, down into his policeman's stomach. Then he would click his heels again and salute.

"What's he doing?" Oska whispered.

"He's offering us his respects."

"For a rouble?"

The policeman seemed embarrassed.

"What are you doing here, you rascals?" our father boomed.

"Papa! The policeman's giving us his respects for a rouble!" Oska shouted.

OUR CAPTAIN AT HOME

Papa was a very tall man with a great mass of curly blond hair. He had tremendous drive and never seemed to tire. After a hard day he could drink a samovar-full of tea. His movements were quick and his voice loud. Sometimes, when Papa got angry at a local peasant who had come to him with an ailment, he would begin to shout, and we feared the patient might die of fright, if nothing else, for we certainly would have.

However, Papa was also a very cheerful person. Sometimes a man who had come to complain of a pain in the chest would soon forget about it and roar with laughter as he gripped his sides. When Papa's booming laugh sounded in the house the cat would dash under the sideboard and waves would appear in the fishbowl. He would often scandalize Annushka by carrying Mamma into the dining-room

and say, "The lady of the house has arrived for dinner," as he sat her down.

Papa liked to have fun. As we sat at the table he would say, "Hey you, Caldonians, Balvonians and highwaymen, don't look so glum." He would chuck us under our chins and add, "Get your beards out of your soup."

The King of Schwambrania was aping Papa when he said, "Get some life into those nags," to his driver.

When Papa demanded another cot for the free community hospital he would speak at the town meetings, and all the rich farmers would grumble, "No need for that." Our local paper, *The Saratov News*, would carry a report of the meeting, describing the chairman calling our father to order, while "the honourable doctor demanded that Mr. Gutnik's words be included in the minutes of the meeting and, in reply, Mr. Gutnik said that...".

Papa knew everyone in town. Flower-decked wedding parties nearly always felt it their duty to stop their sleighs outside our house, enveloping it in a cloud of dazzling colour and song. Breshka Street was strewn with wrapped candies that were tossed into the crowd by the handful from the sleighs. Hundreds of bells jangled on the beribboned yokes. Musicians played in the rug-draped lead sleighs. The red-faced, shrieking matchmakers would dance right in the broad sleighs, waving bouquets of paper flowers tied up with ribbons.

Papa was also remembered in connection with the following incident.

At one time a gang of thugs terrorized the town. The thugs were all middle-aged family men, and the police were not providing any protection for the population.

Then the people decided to take the law into their own hands. They drew up a list of the most dangerous men and the crowd set out, going to each house on the list in turn and murdering the men on the list.

All this took place in the dead of night.

One of the ringleaders found refuge in Papa's hospital. He really was very sick. He begged Papa to save him from the mob, going down on his knees to plead for his life.

"They're justified in settling the score," Papa said. "You can thank your lucky stars you got sick when you did. Since you'll be my patient, that's all I'm concerned about at present. I don't want to know anything else. Get up and go lie down."

The angry crowd surrounded the hospital. Men shouted and cursed outside the locked gates. Papa went outside the fence to face the crowd. "What do you want? I won't let you in, so you might as well turn back! You'll bring all sorts of germs into the surgical wards. And we'll have to disinfect the whole hospital."

"You just hand over Balbashenko, Doctor. We'll sign-a paper saying we're responsible for him. We'll... take good care of him."

"Balbashenko has a very high fever," Papa replied in a steely voice. "I cannot discharge him now, and that's final! And stop all the noise. You're frightening the other patients."

The crowd advanced silently. Suddenly, an old stevedore stepped forward and said, "The doctor's right, boys. That's according to their laws. Come on, let's go. We'll take care of Balbashenko later. Sorry to have bothered you. Doc."

Balbashenko was "taken care of three months later.

THE LAND OF HANON

Papa had a terrible temper. When he was really angry he was deafening. We would be chastised and chastened, reprov'd and reprimanded, admonished, upbraided and raked over the coals. That was when Mamma entered the scene.

She was our soft pedal during all of Papa's really excessive tirades. He would always tone down in her presence.

Mamma was a pianist and music teacher. All day long the house resounded with scales rippling up and down the keyboard and the drumming of finger exercises. The dull voice of a pupil with a cold could be heard counting out loud: "One an' two, an' three, one an' two, an' three...." Then Mamma would sing, to the tune of Hanon's immortal piano exercises: "One and five, and three, and one, and four, and don't raise your elbows, and five and one...."

It seemed this song was an accompaniment to all our childhood years. In fact, all my memories can be sung to the tune of those finger exercises. All save those associated with the sticky, fever-ridden days of diphtheria, the measles, scarlet fever and the croup come back to me minus this musical background, for then Mamma devoted herself entirely to restoring our health.

Mamma was nearsighted. She would bend low over the music, so that by the day's end she would be seeing spots from all the black squiggles that were called notes.

There was a bronze paper-holder on the desk in Papa's consulting room. It was made in the shape of a woman's delicate, tapering hand and held a sheaf of prescription blanks, postal receipts and bills. Mamma's hands were just like that. As a pampered young damsel she had left her parents' home in a large city to accompany her husband to his rural practice in the wilds of Vyatka region. She was to spend many a sleepless night sitting by the dark, frosted window, waiting up for Papa. There was a draught from the window. The flame of the small night light flickered. Bitter frost, a blizzard and darkness enveloped the house. Papa was somewhere out in the howling gale, riding in a horse-drawn sleigh, on his way to patient in a village fifteen miles away. Tiny lights would appear in the darkness,

but these were not lighted windows, they were the glittering eyes of wolves. The distant churchbell, that beacon of all nights when blizzards raged, faded in the distance. Papa would follow the sound. In time the dark houses of a village would appear among the snowdrifts. There Papa would perform an emergency operation by the glow of a rushlight in a stuffy log cabin, rank with the smell of sheepskin coats. Then he would wash his hands and head back home.

THE WHISTLE AWAKENED SCHWAMBRANIA

In winter there were blizzards in Pokrovsk, too. The steppe would attack the settlement with snowstorms and sharp winds. Then the churchbells of Pokrovsk would toll on through the night, guiding stragglers back to the snow-covered road.

Our family was all at home in our warm house. The blizzard spun on like a spindle, spinning its fine, frosty thread, howling in the chimney. It was our houseboat whistling from its safe berth in a sheltered harbour.

The guests that evening were our usual visitors: Terpanian, the tax inspector, and the dentist, a tiny man named Pufler. Oska had just embarrassed everyone by confusing his words and calling Pufler a denture instead of a dentist.

Papa and the tax inspector were playing chess. Mamma was playing a minuet by Paderewski, and Annushka was carrying in the samovar, which was saying "puff", whistling and saying "wheeee...."

Terpanian, who was a jolly man, teased Annushka, as always, pretending he was going to poke her in the ribs as he made a scarey noise.

Annushka got frightened, as she always did, and shrieked, making the tax inspector laugh and say, "Yippee!"

Papa looked at the clock and said, "All right, you rascals, off to bed! We won't detain you any longer."

We politely bid everyone goodnight and went off to sail away to Schwambrania for the night.

The mooring ropes were cast off, which meant we had taken off our shoes. Sailing whistles could be heard in the nursery. Then the last commands were sounded: "Left paddle ahead! Shhhhh! Whooo!"

"Half speed ahead! Full steam ahead!"

We were Schwambranians again. We were sick and tired of safe harbors, of being barred from the kitchen, of piano exercises and patients ringing the front doorbell. We were sailing for our second homeland. The shores of Big Tooth Continent could be seen beyond the place where the Earth curved. The Black Queen, the keeper of the secret of Schwambrania, was imprisoned in the seashell grotto. The palaces of Drandzonsk awaited us.

We finally arrived. I stood on the bridge and pulled the whistle lever. There was a loud blast.

It was a loud approaching whistle. I opened my eyes. I was in Pokrovsk. Back in our room. The whistle sounded again. An urgent blast hit the window. The room was filled with the loud, oppressing sound of the whistle. It passed through the house, dragging its feet.

It did not stop. Then bells began ringing all over the house. The front doorbell pealed. The bell for Papa's consulting room rang in the kitchen. The telephone was jangling. I could hear Papa shouting: "They should all be hanged! Couldn't they have foreseen such a thing? Well, it's too late to talk about it now. Do you have enough stretchers? I'm on my way. Have you sent a horse for me? I'll be right over. The hospital's been alerted."

The whistle was warning us about some great calamity. Mamma came rushing into our room. She said there had been a terrible accident at the bone-meal factory, where the high wall of the drying shed had collapsed. The manager had told the workers to load too many bones on it, and the wall was very old. He had been warned that the wall might give way. Now it had collapsed under great weight, falling on top of fifty men. Papa and the other doctors had all rushed to the factory to try to save the victims.

So. That's what.... That's what. That's what could happen. But never in Schwambrania! Never!

CRITICISING THE WORLD AND OUR OWN LIVES

The collapse of the wall in the bone-meal factory brought about the collapse of our faith in the well-being of the all-powerful tribe of adults. Some pretty awful things were going on in their world. That was when we decided to take a very critical look at it. We found that:

1. Not all grown-ups are in charge of world affairs, but only those who wear official uniforms, expensive fur-lined coats and starched white collars. All the rest, and these form the majority, are called "undesirable acquaintances".

2. The owner of the bone-meal factory, who is responsible for the deaths and injuries of fifty workers, all of whom are "undesirable acquaintances" got off scot-free. The Schwambranians would never have let him live among them.

3. Oska and I don't have to work at all (except at our lessons), while Klavdia, Annushka's niece, scrubs floors and washes dishes for the

neighbours and can only have a piece of candy on Sundays. Besides, she's landless, for she has no Schwambrania to go to.

We ended our list of the world's injustices by drawing a long line along the margin and printing a stern and angry word along its entire length. The word was: *Injustices*.

"MIXING WITH THE PEOPLE"

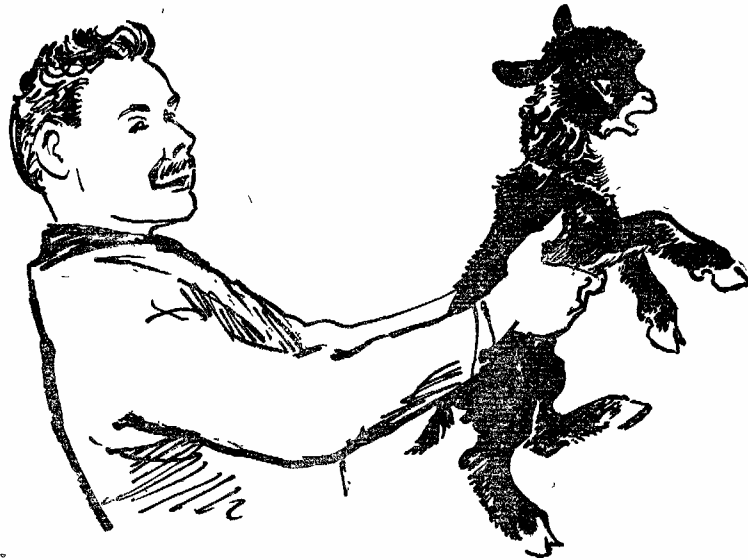
We later added our own upbringing to our list of injustices. I now realize that I cannot really blame our parents, for they lived in different times, and there were many who were much worse. The disgraceful way of life of those times had a demoralizing effect on us, as it did on our parents. It is strange to think that our parents believed they were quite progressive in bringing up their children. For instance, we had to mop up the puddle we made near the fishbowl ourselves and were forbidden to call Annushka to help us. Papa spoke of this proudly and at length when he visited his friends. He wished to bring us up in a democratic spirit and, to this end, would sometimes take us for a buggy ride without a driver. He would hire a gig and horse and we would ride off "to mix with the people". Papa, dressed in a tussore shirt, would drive. He would shout "Whoa!" "Hey, there!" and "Giddiyap!" with relish. However, there would always be some confusion if an elegant lady appeared on foot on the narrow road ahead. Then Papa would sound embarrassed as he said, "Go on and sing something, boys. But make it good and loud, so she'll turn around. After all, I can't shout, 'Get out of the way' can I? Especially since I think I know her."

And so we would sing. When this did not work and the lady kept on walking slowly. Papa would send me on ahead. I would climb down from my seat, catch up with the woman and say in my most polite voice:

"Uh, Miss.... Lady.... Papa wants you to move over, because we can't pass. We don't want to run you over." Though the women would always step aside, for some reason or other they were usually offended.

Our rides "to mix with the people" ended when Papa once sent us all tumbling into a ditch.

THE ANIMAL WORLD



In order to instil a love for the birds and the beasts in us and in this way ennoble our souls, our parents would occasionally buy us a pet. We had dogs, cats and fishes. The fishes lived in a fishbowl. One day our parents noticed that the little goldfish were disappearing one by one. They discovered that Oska had been fishing them out, putting them in matchboxes and burying them in the sand. He had been very much impressed by a funeral procession and had set up a regular fish cemetery in the yard.

Then there was the very unpleasant encounter between Oska and the cat, which had scratched him badly when he had tried to brush its teeth with Papa's toothbrush.

The incident involving the kid was most unfortunate. The whole idea was a mistake from the very beginning, though Papa had bought the kid especially for us. It was black and small, and curly-haired with a hard, round forehead. It looked as if it might be a live Persian lamb collar for Papa's winter coat. Papa brought the kid into the parlour. Its spindly legs slid out from under it on the slippery linoleum.

"He's all yours," Papa said. "And make sure you take good care of him!" The kid said "baa-aa" and dropped some marbles on the rug. Then he nibbled on the wallpaper in the study and wet an armchair. Luckily, Papa was having his after-dinner nap and so had no idea of what was happening. We played with the frisky kid for a while, then got tired of the game and went off, forgetting all about our new curly-haired pet. The kid disappeared. An hour later there was a loud thumping on the piano keys, though there was no one in the parlour. It was the kid jumping on the keyboard. This woke Papa. He was in a hurry to leave for his evening rounds at the hospital and dressed without putting on the light. He soon came yawning into the dining room. Oska and I were so astonished we plopped

down on the same chair. Mamma threw up her hands. Papa looked at his feet and gasped. One of his trouser legs barely reached his knee. It hung in sticky, chewed strips. So that was what the kid had been up to! That very evening it was taken back to its previous owner.

THE WORLD AROUND US

Father and Mother worked hard from morning till evening, while we, to tell the honest truth, were the world's greatest loafers. We had been provided with a classical "perfect childhood". We had a gym of our own, toy trains, automobiles and steamboats. We had tutors to teach us languages, drawing and music. We knew Grimm's Fairy Tales by heart, as well as Greek mythology and the Russian epic poems. However, all this paled as far as I was concerned after I had read an indifferent-looking book called, I believe, *The World Around Us*. It described in simple language how bread was baked, how vinegar was obtained, how bricks were made, how steel was smelted and how leather was tanned. The book introduced me to the fascinating world of things and to the people who made them. The salt on our table had gone through a grainer, and the cast iron pot through a blast furnace. I discovered that shoes, saucers, scissors, windowsills, steam engines and tea had all been invented, extracted, produced and made by the toil of many, many people and were the result of their knowledge and skill. The story about a sheepskin coat was no less interesting than the tale of the golden fleece. I suddenly had a terrible urge to start making useful things myself. However, my old books and my teachers never provided any information about the people who made things, though they dwelled ecstatically on the many royal heroes. We were being brought up as helpless, useless gentlemen, or as an arrogant caste of people whose lives were devoted to "pure brainwork". True, we had building blocks with which we were expected to produce something imaginative. Our pent-up energy sought an outlet. We extracted the couch springs in order to discover the true construction of things and were severely punished for our efforts.

We even envied a fellow named Fektistka, the pock-marked tinsmith's apprentice, who looked down on us for still being in short pants. Though he was illiterate, he knew how to make real pails, dustpans, tin mugs, basins and tubs. However, when we saw him at the river one day, Fektistka showed us the very real black-and-blue marks and bruises on his bony body, the result of the hard lessons his master's heavy hand taught him, for the tinsmith beat Fektistka unmercifully. He made the boy work from dawn to dusk, fed him scraps and pummelled his bony back to teach him the principles of the tinsmith's trade.

INTELLECT AND HANDIWORK

We stopped envying Fektistka after that. Disturbing thoughts filled our heads.

It seemed that people who were engaged in mental work were wholly at the mercy of ordinary things, while the skilled workers who made them had none of their own.

Whenever the toilet would not flush properly or a lock got stuck, or the piano had to be moved, Annushka was sent downstairs to the basement apartment where a railroadman and his family lived, to ask "someone" to come up and help. As soon as "someone" came upstairs the things would obey him: the piano would roll off to whenever it was supposed to go, the toilet would cough and begin to work properly, and the lock would let go of the key. Mamma would say, "He can fix everything," and would then be sure to count the silver spoons in the sideboard.

If, on the other hand, the people in the basement apartment wanted to write to a brother who lived in a distant village, they would come to "the gentleman" upstairs. As the railroadman watched Papa's pen fly across the sheet of paper, taking down his letter as he dictated it, he would say in wonder: "Ah, that's book learning for you! How can you compare it to our trade! That's pure ignorance."

In their heart of hearts the inhabitants of each floor despised the inhabitants of the other.

"What's so special about that?" Papa said, for his pride was hurt. "So he fixed the toilet. I'd like to see him perform an operation."

Meanwhile, the people downstairs were saying to themselves: "I'd like to see you crawling around on all fours under a locomotive's belly. Whisking a pen around isn't anything to brag about."

The relationship between our two floors could only be compared to the relationship of the blind man and his leader, a legless man, in the well-known story. The blind man carried the legless man, who looked ahead from his perch on the other's shoulders. It was a doubtful alliance bound by a grudging dependence upon each other.

Still and all, the "undesirable acquaintances" knew how to make things. Perhaps they would have taught us something, if not for the fact that we were being brought up as "gentlemen who worked only with their brains", so that the closest we got to work was making paper boats and model factories. We consoled ourselves with the thought that on the Big Tooth Continent every last inhabitant not only knew a lot of fairy tales by heart, but could also bind them into a book if necessary.

GOD AND OSKA

Oska was a great one for confusing things. He had learned to read when he was much too young and from the time he was four he could remember anything at all, from the names on shop signs to articles in the medical encyclopaedia. He remembered everything he read, but this produced chaos in his head, for he would always mix up the strange new words he had discovered. He was forever making everyone laugh. He would confuse "pomade" and "pyramid" and said "monoclers" instead of "chroniclers".

Once he wanted to ask Mamma for a sandwich and instead said, "Mamma, may I have a Greenwich?"

"Good gracious!" Mamma exclaimed. "I'm sure he must be a child wonder!" A day later Oska said, "There's a new wonder in the office, too, Mamma! They bang on it and it types."

What he meant, of course, was the Underwood typewriter. However, there were things he was very sure about. Mamma once read him a famous story with a moral about a boy who was too lazy to pick up a horseshoe and then had to pick up all the plums his father had purposely dropped on the road. "Did you understand the meaning of the story?" she asked. "Yes. It's about you shouldn't eat dirty plums off the ground." Oska felt that everyone without exception was an old friend of his. He would strike up a conversation with anyone at all on the street, overwhelming the person with the strangest questions.

I once left him alone for a while in the public gardens. He was bouncing his ball and it landed in a flower bed. He reached over to get it, crushed some flowers, then saw the sign that said": "Keep off the grass" and became frightened.

He then decided to seek outside help. A tall woman dressed in black and wearing a straw hat was sitting on a bench some distance away. She had her back to Oska, but he could see her shoulder-length curls.

"My ball bounced into the 'keep off the flowers'," he said to the lady's back.

The lady turned, and Oska was terrified to see that she had a heavy beard. He forgot all about his ball. "Why do you have a beard on, lady?"



"Do I look like a lady?" the lady said in a deep, kindly voice. "I'm a priest, my son."

"A priest-mason?" Oskari said doubtfully. "Then why do you have on a skirt?" He knew a mason was a bricklayer and imagined it was awfully inconvenient to slap cement on bricks while wearing a skirt that reached to the ground.

"This is not a skirt, it's a cassock, as is only proper for a man of the cloth."

"Wait," Oskari said, trying to recall something. "I know. You're the man which makes cloth. And there's a lady, too. It's music that comes out of the gramophone. She spins cloth of gold."

"Aren't you a joker!" the priest laughed. "But aren't you a Christian? Who's your father? Your papa? Ah, a doctor. I see. Do you know about God?"

"Yes. God's in the kitchen. Annushka hung him in the corner. His name's Christ Has Risen."

"God is everywhere," the priest said sternly. "At home, in the fields, in the gardens. He is everywhere. God can hear us talking here this very minute. He is with us every minute of the day and night."

Oskari looked around, but did not see God and so he decided that the priest was playing some new kind of game with him. "Is God for real or make-believe?"

"I'll put it to you this way. How did all this come about?" The priest pointed to the flowers.

"It wasn't me, honest! That's how they were," Oska said quickly, thinking the man had noticed the crushed flowers.

"God created all this."

Oska was happy the man thought it was all God's doing.

"And God created you, too."

"No, he didn't! Mamma made me."

"And who made your mamma?"

"Her mamma. Grandma!"

"And what about the very first mamma?"

"She just happened. From out of a monkey," Oska said, for he and I had already read *My First Natural History Book*.

"Ugh!" the perspiring priest exclaimed. "That's a godless, lawless upbringing, a corruption of infants' minds!" And he stomped off, with the skirt of his habit raising a cloud of dust.

Oska recounted the conversation to me, word for word. "And he was so funny looking! He had on a dress and a beard, too!"

Our family was not very religious. Papa said that God could hardly exist, while Mamma said that God was nature, but, on the other hand, that He could punish us. As far as we were concerned, God had originally appeared from our nurse's bedtime stories. He later entered the house through the kitchen door which was left slightly ajar. God, as we imagined Him, consisted of votive light, church bells and the delicious smell of the freshly-baked Easter cakes. At times He appeared as an angry, distant force, thundering in the sky and keeping an eye on such things as whether it was a sin to stick your tongue out at your mother or not. There was a picture in *My First Bible Stories* of God sitting on a cloud of smoke, creating the whole world on page 1. However, the very first book we read on natural history dispersed the smoke. That did not leave God anything to sit on.

HEAVENLY SCHWAMBRANIA

But it did leave something called the Kingdom of Heaven. Whenever beggars stopped at our house and Annushka turned them away she would console them and herself with the knowledge that all beggars, all poor people and, apparently, all people who came under the heading of undesirable acquaintances, would go straight to paradise after their proper funerals, and there they would promenade in the heavenly glades.

One day Oska and I decided that we had already been transported there. Marisha, the neighbours' maid, was getting married at Trinity Church, and Annushka took us along.

It was as beautiful inside the church as in Schwambrania, and the church smelled good. There were paintings all over the walls of angels and quite a few of old men, all of whom were surrounded by puffy clouds. There were many lighted candles, although it was bright daylight outside. As for beggars, why, there were as many beggars there as in paradise, and all of them were busy praying.

Then the main priest came out and pretended that he was God. As Oska was to tell everyone later, he had on a big golden baby's vest, and then he put on a long bib over his head, and it was all made of gold, too. Then he stood before a stand, and a sheet was spread on the floor in front of it. Marisha looked just like a princess, and she and her groom stood side by side. Then they went into a huddle, like we did when we were choosing sides for a game. They went over and stood right on the sheet. We couldn't hear what they and the priest were talking about, but Oska swore that they had thought of a charade and wanted the priest to guess whether it was "a trunkful of money or a golden shore". And then the priest said, "Better or worse?" And Marisha said, "You do?" Then the priest said to the groom:

"Your wetted wife?" and the groom said: "I, too." And Marisha looked as if she was crying. "Wasn't that silly?" Oska said. "What was she bawling for? It's all make-believe anyway."

After that he said they played "Who's got the ring?", and when they were through with the game the priest told them to hold hands. Then they played ring-around-a-rosie, and the priest led them around the stand. The choir sang and sang, and they ended by singing: "Hal, yell Loolia! Hal, yell Loolia!" Then Marisha chose her groom and they kissed.

After our visit to the church we decided that paradise was a sort of Schwambrania that the grown-ups had invented for poor people.

In our own Schwambrania I decided to establish a clergy of our own (at first Oska confused clergy with purging), to make things more pompous. Patriarch Liverpill was the chief prelate of Schwambrania. Instead of addressing him as "Your Grace", we used "Your Disgrace".

CINDERELLA OF POKROVSK

All fairy tales always had happy endings. Scullery maids became princesses, sleeping beauties awoke, witches perished, and lost orphans found their parents. There was always a wedding on the last page, with the groom and bride living happily ever after.

In Schwambrania, a land that was half-real, a happy ending was the glorious finishing touch of every adventure. Thus it was that we came to the conclusion that

people could certainly live much happier lives if they followed our example and played make-believe.

Actually, we were to discover that fairy tales were the only place where everyone lived happily ever after, for a real fairy tale which the people around us tried to play at ended most unhappily.

Everyone knows the story about the poor maid whose name was Cinderella and her mean old stepmother who made her work so hard. Everyone knows of the doves that plucked all the grain from the ashes, and of the Good Fairy who sent her to the ball, and of the glass slipper Cinderella lost in the palace.

But I'm sure no one knows that the story of Cinderella is recorded in the old Department Ledger, the dread Black Book of the Pokrovsk Boys High School.

The school supervisor, nicknamed Seize'em, recorded a new version of the story on the pages of the ledger. But his entry was very brief and acid. That is why I will have to tell you the story of Cinderella from Pokrovsk myself. Her name was Marfusha. She was temporarily our parlour maid, and she collected stamps.

THE CANCELLED EAGLES

The stamps came from distant cities and lands. The envelopes they were pasted on contained letters of greetings, news, requests, thanks, as well as the latest remedies for alcoholism, anaemia and other illnesses. Foreign drug firms sent Papa information about their patent medicines.

Marfusha would steam the stamps off the empty envelopes by holding them over the samovar. There were hundreds of stamps in the brass-bound chest under her bed, sorted into small cigarette boxes.

My brother and I delivered the envelopes to the kitchen. Philately strengthened the bonds of friendship between Marfusha and us.

She shared all her secrets with us.

We knew that she was sweet on the driver who worked at Papa's hospital, and that the clerk at the drugstore was a stuck-up good-for-nothing, because he teased Marfusha and called her Marfusion.

We also discovered that if a person sneezed you had to say: "Achoo, match in your nose, a pair of wheels and the axle end to make your nose itch; wind take your sneeze, guts on gunny sacks, tendons on a wire, belly on a yoke." Whew!

In the evenings Marfusha would unlock her chest and let us admire her treasures.

There were complete issues of Peter the Great and other monarchs. The Alexanders were kept according to their numbers: Alexander I, II, and III. The

cancellation dates covered the emperors' noses. Cancelled eagles fluffed their feathers on the red, green and blue squares of paper with saw-toothed edges. Weird lions hid behind the inked bars.

We admired the collection, as Marfusha ran her hands through the tsars and eagles fondly and day-dreamed aloud:

"I'll sell 'em soon's I get two thousand of 'em. An' I'll buy myself a fine lady's dress. There'll be ruffles down the front, and a bow behind, and a dotted veil to go all around. We'll see who'll dare call me Marfusion then. We'll see...."

THE GASEOUS AUTHORITIES

Mitya Lamberg had been expelled from the 2nd Saratov High School for having spoken unfavourably of the Bible class. He was then enrolled in the Pokrovsk Boys High and came to live with us. Mitya said he was a victim of reaction and considered it his sacred duty to annoy the authorities.

He said: "I'm avenging, I mean, taking vengeance on the authorities in every one of its states: liquid, hard and gaseous."

Mitya regarded his parents as the authorities of the liquid, drippy state. He had to accept the school principal and teachers as hard-state authorities. He regarded the government, the police and the local Zemstvo inspector as the gaseous authorities that seeped into everything. The boys had a special score to settle with the Zemstvo inspector. The senior boys spoke of two schoolgirls named Zoya Shvydchenko and Emma Uger. When school was out in the afternoons the inspector's sleigh was often seen on the corner waiting for Zoya and Emma, and the gaseous figure of the fat inspector always accompanied one or the other girl at the skating rink. The boys seethed. They threw snowballs at him from behind a fence. They had drawn a large black cat on the fence and written "Tomcat" under it.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Our cousin Victor, a young artist, came to spend Christmas with us. He was long-nosed and full of fun and ideas.

"He's nice, but his nose is way out to here," Marfusha said of him.

There was always a Christmas Eve masked ball at the Merchants' Assembly, I invitation only. Ladies we knew were busy having their costumes made. My parents had also received an invitation. That was when Mitya Lambert got the bright idea of getting even with the Zemstvo inspector during the ball. Pa] was all

for it. Victor offered his services as an artist. We began to think of the costumes.

Everyone was deep in thought that day. From time to time Mitya would break the silence by rushing excitedly into the dining-room, shouting.

"I've got it! It's hilarious!"

"What?" we'd all ask.

"How about dressing as a suicide? And the message on the corpse, I mean on the costume can be: 'The Zemstvo inspector has driven me to my grave' Ha'ha."

"With the orchestra playing a Chopin march," Mamma quipped. "Indeed, it's too funny for words."

"I've never laughed so hard in my life," Papa said sadly.

Mitya was embarrassed. He did a handstand and said as his legs swayed in the air: "I'll stand here like this till some good ideas flow into my head."

At last Papa had a brainstorm. It really was a wonderful idea for a costume. Besides, his plan was magnificent in every other respect. Marfusha was to go to the ball and flirt with the flirtatious inspector.

We trooped off to the kitchen.

"Fair Marfusha, we have come to inquire whether you'd like to go to the ball at the Merchants' Assembly," Papa said solemnly.

"Goodness gracious! But it's by invitation only. How'll I get in?"

"You'll be the queen of the ball, Marfusha. There's only one drawback. We'll need all of your stamps. Can you bear to part with them?"

"Just think, Marfusha!" Mitya pleaded. "You'll have the Zemstvo inspector at your mercy. It's up to you. You'll be the queen of the ball."

"Ah, well," Marfusha said after a long pause. She sighed and bent down to pull her chest out from under her bed.

DAYS GLUED TOGETHER WITH RUBBER CEMENT

For the next two days everyone worked on Marfusha's costume. Piles of cut-up cardboard and paper were scattered all over "the master's kitchen", as Marfusha called Papa's study. There were streaks and smudges of paint and gum-arabic on us all. Tubes of rubber cement spun out sticky thin threads. Victor strutted about with his nose in the air, and there were drops of perspiration and india-ink on his face. Papa tried to pull an Argentinian stamp off his jacket. Mamma was giving Marfusha lessons in deportment and teaching her a few French phrases. Oskia and I had suddenly become Siamese twins after accidentally sitting down on a long strip of ribbon that had been covered with rubber cement. The ribbon stuck fast to our

pants, glueing us together.

The evening of the ball Marfusha was powdered and her hair was curled. Then she was helped into her costume. It was a huge envelope, addressed and ready to be posted. There were stamps a foot long on the corners of the envelope. A good hundred of Marfusha's stamps had been used to make up each of the costume stamps. Victor had worked hard to match the colours and shapes. There were crazy postmarks going every which way. The address on the envelope had been done in a fine round hand and read:

SPECIAL DELIVERY
THE NORTH POLE
*For: His Excellency
and Northern Grace*
SIR ENSTVO, INSPECTOR-ZEMSTVO
THE POLAR ZEMSTVO OFFICE
Captain Hatteras Square
You'll know it when you are there.
From: London, the City
You'll find it if you're witty.

After Marfusha was sealed into the large envelope a small envelope was set on her head for a hat. It, too, had stamps on each of its four corners. There was a poem on the paper envelope-hat which read:

*Never -will you guess my name,
All your guesses are in vain.
No one here can hint or tell,
None will be of any help.
Every Zoya, Emma, Mae
Will be deaf and dumb today.*

Marfusha's slippers had also been covered with postage stamps. She looked very attractive in her envelope-gown.

"You're so beautiful, Marfusha!" Oska said. "You're just as beautiful as the lady on the shampoo picture, only beautifuller."

A white silk mask with silver edging hid most of Marfusha's face.

Victor was elected to be the honourary postman.

No one in town knew him. Besides, he had stuck on a large black moustache And donned Mamma's black hat with the ostrich feather. This and his own Ion nose made him look both sinister and romantic at one and the same time. H might have been a Spanish grandee, or a Rumanian organ-grinder.

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER

Victor and his precious letter drove up to the Assembly building in style. Um-pa-pa, um-pa-pa went the bass drum in the brightly-lit ballroom. Victor handed Marfusha down from the cab and then helped her off with her coat. He bowed low with reverence.

"Guten tag, comment allez-vous? Bene, bene!" he said and twirled his frozen moustache.

The porters regarded them respectfully. Bright lights, music and the shrieks and laughter of a party in full swing enveloped them. Once upstairs, Marfusha was immediately surrounded and everyone began reading the message on the envelope. For a moment a burst of laughter drowned out the music. Then, just as suddenly, it stopped. Through the slits in her mask Marfusha glimpsed the baffled Zemstvo inspector's face.

He read the message and turned red. However, Marfusha's dainty feet in their stamp-covered slippers caught his roving eye. "Harrumph," he said. "My dear Anonymous, may I have this waltz?"

"Mais oui," Anonymous replied. "Parlez-vous francaise?"

The Zemstvo inspector was taken aback, for he did not parlez a word of French. One of the merchants, Adolph Stark, came to his aid and between them they tried to make her understand that the inspector wished to dance with her. The music boomed. The musicians puffed out their cheeks. It seemed that the very walls were expanding from the booming of the drum. The music wrung everyone's heart out like a wet hankie. The inspector treated Marfusha to ice cream. Adolph Stark melted away as quickly as it did. The Zemstvo inspector kissed her hand. All the other ladies were dying of envy. Guesses as to her identity and paper streamers filled the air. Confetti showered down. Marfusha's little plate was soon piled high with ballots, for everyone was voting hers the best costume.

"Stop the music!" the Zemstvo inspector shouted.

The orchestra, which was blaring away, stopped playing as suddenly as a gramophone that had run down.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" the inspector announced. "The 'Letter' has received the most votes and First Prize. A gold watch! Three cheers for the lovely

Anonymous! And now let us open the envelope!"

There was a babble of voices. Confetti bombs burst overhead. Someone whispered in Marfusha's ear: "Good for you, fair Marfusha. Good for you! Keep it up!"



Mitya was standing around with a group of his classmates. They were laughing. Then he went over to the Zemstvo inspector and said:

"You know, I think I recognize Anonymous. It's the well-known.... Oh, I shouldn't have said that! I promised not to tell!"

"I beg you to," the Zemstvo inspector whispered. "To hell with your promise. Tell me who she is! Would you care for some ice cream?"

"No, don't even ask," Mitya said as he polished off a dish of ice cream.

"Let's open the letter, everybody!" the Zemstvo inspector shouted.

At that very moment a long-nosed stranger with a huge moustache appeared in the ballroom.

Spouting angry gibberish "Carramba peppermint oleonapht, sept accord

dominant!" he took Marfusha's arm and steered her quickly towards the stairs.

The Zemstvo inspector rushed after them, with all the colourful harlequins, dominoes, hussars, flower baskets, Chinese dolls, butterflies, Gypsies and princesses in tow. However, Victor's impressive nose and moustache kept them all at bay.

Mitya and his classmates cut the crowd off as if by accident while Marfusha buttoned up her coat and the sleigh pulled away.

Victor jumped into the moving sleigh, which then carried them swiftly along the sleeping streets. Marfusha's eyelids drooped. The street lamps, like some great jellyfish, slowly moved their golden beams. Cinderella returned to the kitchen.

That night a new gold watch ticked away softly near the empty chest.

Marfusha was sound asleep. She had had a wonderful time and was very tired. The torn envelope, that shell of the magic evening, lay empty by the bed. Four pairs of shoes stood guard outside her door.

They would have to be shined the next morning.

CINDERELLA IS EXPOSED

The Pokrovsk society column of the *Saratov News* carried the following item:

"There was a masquerade at the Merchants' Assembly last Wednesday. Among the many striking costumes the most popular by far was one called 'The Anonymous Letter'.

"The costume was ingeniously made in the shape of an envelope with real cancelled postage stamps on it and a witty address. It was quite justly awarded the First Prize, a gold watch which was bestowed by Mr. Razudanov, the Zemstvo inspector.

"Despite the insistence of the other guests, the mysterious damsel refused to reveal her identity and was carried off by a person unknown to the gathering. Rumour has it that she is a well-known actress."

Two days later, when the town was still alive with gossip as to her identity, Papa was called in to see the Zemstvo inspector's wife, who had a migraine headache. After he had attended to his patient. Papa had a glass of tea with the inspector.

"My dear doctor, you should have come to the masquerade. You don't know what you missed. There was a young lady there who, ah, I can't even begin to describe her. It was a barb in my direction, I must admit, but you should have seen those dainty feet! And those lovely hands! You can always tell a lady by her hands and feet, I'm sure she is a foreigner. You know, I can't get her out of my mind."

"Indeed? I really don't think she's that extraordinary. It was only our parlourmaid Marfusha."

"Wha-a-at?" The inspector sat bolt upright. His face turned livid, his jaw sagged and his eyes bulged.

Papa could contain his laughter no longer and roared so, the inspector's wife had another migraine attack.

CINDERELLA'S SLIPPER

Here ends the story of the last Cinderella. A young page from the palace did not open the kitchen door and hand Marfusha a glass slipper.

However, a trace of Cinderella's famous slipper appeared on a page of the school's Department Ledger, for the doves that had plucked the gold dust from the pot of ashes for Marfusha were made to pay for what they had done.

Several days later a rubber galosh of tremendous proportions was found nailed to the Zemstvo inspector's front porch. That very same morning the following notices were pasted on various fences:

"AN ORDER

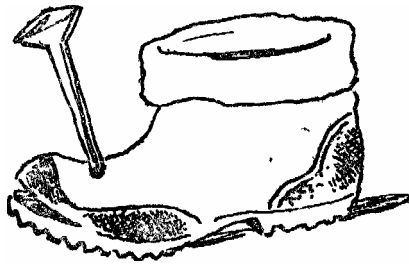
"I hereby order the entire female population of Pokrovsk to appear before the Zemstvo inspector in order to try on a slipper, lost by a mysterious lady who attended the masquerade at the Merchants' Assembly. The lady whose foot it fits will be immediately appointed Zemstvo inspectoress. The Zemstvo inspector pledges to be forever under this slipper's heel.

(Signed) *Razudanov Zemstvo Inspector*"

They said that the next morning, while the galosh was still on the porch, a peasant woman who had heard of the order tried her luck, but her foot was too big.

"It's just a bit tight," she said sadly and spat into the galosh.

Mitya and three of his classmates were reprimanded "for unbecoming conduct in a public place and unbridled mischief, detrimental to the school and the school system". Their marks for behaviour for the term were lowered. Such is the epilogue. It is quite unlike the end of the old fairy tale.



THE DOVE BOOK

INTRODUCTION



I took my school entrance examination that spring. Dmitry Alexeyevich, my tutor, came to the house early on the fateful morning and made me go over some rules of grammar. Before leaving for the hospital Papa put his large hand on my head, tilted my head back and said:

"Well, how's the old bean?"

Mamma accompanied me to school. She was very nervous, and as we walked along she glanced at me again and again with the greatest concern and kept saying, "The one thing I want you to remember is not to be nervous! Speak loudly and clearly, and don't rush. Think carefully before you answer a question."

Dmitry Alexeyevich walked along on the other side. He was drilling me in the multiplication table. We reached "9 times 9" and the school yard simultaneously.

The day was full of grammar. At the noisy market adjectives, interjections and numerals filled the air. An inanimate locomotive on the spur line near the granary tried to confuse me by tooting and moving like an animate object. When we reached the school door Dmitry Alexeyevich became very solemn, although by looking through his pince-nez I could see his kind and gentle eyes.

"All right. This is it," he said and then quickly added: "What part of speech is a school?"

"An inanimate common noun!" "And a schoolboy?" "An animate...."

At that very moment a big, tall boy wearing the school uniform opened the door. He glanced at my sailor suit with contempt and said glumly: "You're wrong, sonny. A schoolboy's an inanimate object."

I was stunned and baffled both by the size and by the muttered words of this great scholar.

A chill of nervous tension scooted along the school corridor. There was a roll-call. The examiners' table was covered with a heavy green cloth. The first part of the entrance examination was a dictation.

I thought that everyone in the classroom could hear my heart pounding.

Anxious mothers peeped through the door, searching out the bowed heads of their sons, hoping they would get the tricky words right.

I did. But I was so nervous I left off the last letter of my own name.

Next came a written test in arithmetic and our oral examinations.

I named all the parts of speech in a test sentence in Russian grammar. Then the priest came over to me and handed me a book written in church Slavonic. At this the Russian teacher, a blond, curly-haired, fair-bearded man spoke up rather hesitantly:

"I don't believe he needs to know that, Father. I mean, being of another faith and all...." He seemed very embarrassed, as if he had said something impolite. I, too, blushed.

"All the more reason why he should," the priest replied sternly. "Here, read from here."

I read and translated the page he had opened. Several days later my parents were informed that I had been accepted.

JUST LIKE A SOLDIER-BOY

We spent the summer in the country. I felt that I had taken along my new and very impressive title of a schoolboy to the pine and linden forests of Khvalyn, where I proudly carried it to the top of the famed chalk hills, the ravines of Teremshan and the maze of wild raspberry patches we frequented on the sly.

At that time Russia, Europe and the world were just launching a war.

We returned home by boat. New recruits were being transported by the same boat. Newsboys at the various landings shouted the headlines: "Read the latest dispatches! Three thousand prisoners of war! Read all about our trophies!"

Weeping, dishevelled women of all ages crowded near the boat at the landings. They were seeing off their conscripted husbands, fathers, sons and brothers. The parting whistle drowned out their wailing, the ragged cheerings of the men, the floundering band. The stem traced a large, foaming arc in the water, and the whistle sounded again. The sound of it hung suspended in the air. All was still for a moment, and then there was another long, anxious blast.

The crystal pendants of the chandelier in the first-class saloon tinkled in time to the engine's strokes. A piano crashed. The air was heavy with the smells of the Volga, chowder and perfume. Ladies laughed.

Looking through the saloon window, I could see the steep bank drifting away. A string of farm wagons lumbered forlornly up the road from the pier.

They had seen their men off.

My new leather school satchel introduced a manly, army smell to our stateroom. The new term was to begin in two days, and my school uniform awaited me at home. My school days were beginning. Farewell, my neighbourhood friends! I practically felt as if I had been conscripted. When we got home my head was shaved, as was the custom for new boys. Papa said I looked like scarecrow.

"Just like a soldier-boy," Wirkel, the tailor, said as he adjusted my uniform.

BUTTONS

That was a magnificent time. My grandeur and my first long pants were universally recognized.

Boys in the street shouted "squab!" at me, for the colour of the school uniform was dove-grey, and pupils of the Boys School were called squabs. I was proud to have joined the chosen.

The sun shone on my belly and was reflected in the brass buckle of my leather belt, stamped with the black letters of the school. The raised, shiny metal buttons of my dove-grey shirt were like silver lady bugs. On that very solemn and frightening August day I climbed the steps of the school in my new shoes (the left was a bit tight).

I was immediately engulfed by the subdued murmur of the corridor. Out there in the August day, beyond the school doors, were the cottage in the country, the chalk hills, the summer and freedom.

A little old man wearing a tunic with a medal pinned on his chest was coming towards me. He appeared grave and angry, as everyone did to me that day. Recalling my mother's instructions, I clicked my heels and bowed low, having first removed my cap.

"Well, hello, hello," the old man said. "Hang your cap over there. I'll bet you're in the first grade, aren't you? Over there, third to the left."

Once again I bowed low and respectfully.

"Go on, that's enough bowing!" he said and chuckled. Then he got a floor brush from a corner and went off to sweep the corridor.

The boys in my class were all huge and as hairless as I, who must have been the smallest. Some giants in worn or faded school uniforms were walking up and down. These were boys who had been left back. One of them crooked his finger at me.

"C'mon over and sit by me. The seat's empty. Whacher name? Mine's Fuitin-gaich-Tpruntikovsky-Chimparchifarechesalov-Famin-Trepakovsky-Po-ko-leno-Sinemore-Perekhodyashchensky. Say it!" I couldn't.

"Never mind. You'll learn. D'you chew oilcake? No? Got anything to smoke? No? D'you know how the farmer sold his eggs at the market?"

I had never heard that story. The big fellow said I was a ninny. Just then a lively, big-eared, dishevelled boy who had also been left back came over to our double desk. First he sized me up. Then he sat down on the desk and said:

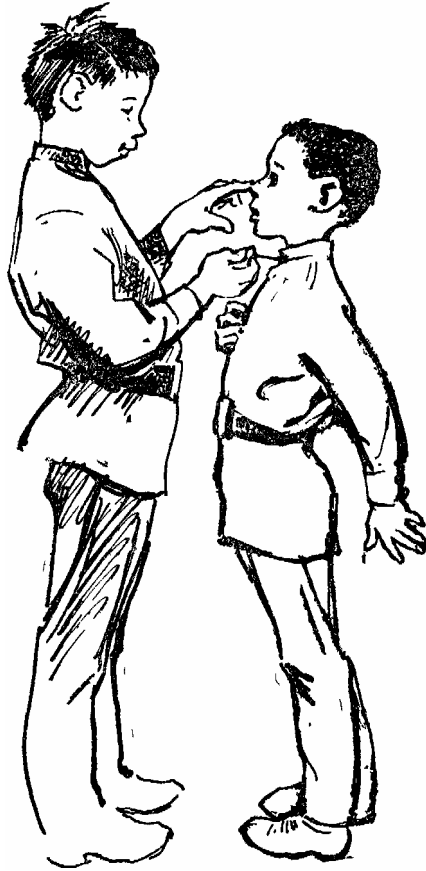
"Are you the doctor's son? You are, aren't you? Doctor's riding on a swine, with his sonny on behind! Whose button is this?" He had got hold of one of the shiny buttons on my cuff.

"Mine. Can't you see?"

"Well, if it's yours, you can have it!" he cried, tore it off and handed it to me. "And whose button is this?" he said, getting hold of the next one.

I had learned my lesson and said I did not know.

"You don't know?" he shouted. "That means it's not yours, is it?" At which he tore off the second button and threw it down. The class burst into laughter. I would have certainly lost all my buttons if the school inspector had not entered a moment. Everyone rose as one man. I liked this form of greeting. The inspector's sly and lively eyes scrutinized us. His bushy beard, combed and parted down the middle like a swallow's tail, brushed the various decorations on his tunic. He spoke in a kind and friendly voice.



"Well now, you shiny, brand-new boys! Had your fill of running wild? Watch your step now, you rascals. 'Tention! Stepan Gavrya! Pull in your belly! Get it back into your satchel! You're repeating the year, but you haven't even learn stand straight, you oaf! Want to be put down in the Deportment Ledger? Look at the mane you've grown! Get a haircut!"

Then the inspector took out a list and called the roll. At this he intentionally confused the names of the big boys who had been left back.

"Shoefeld!" he called instead of Kufeld. "Varekukhonko!" instead of Kukhovarenko.

It was finally my turn.

"Here!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

The inspector raised an eyebrow. "Look how small he is, but what a voice! I can see now why they named you Leo. How old are you?"

I wanted to get in. right with the big boys and so quipped, "Nine-thirty!"

He replied evenly: "You know, Leo, king of the beasts, you scoundrel, that I'll make you stay after school, and that will teach you to be witty. Wait a minute cried, as if I were about to leave. "Wait! Why are there buttons on your cuff? That's against regulations. There's no need to have buttons where they're not supposed to

be." He came up to me and took my sleeve, pulled a pair of funny-looking pincers from his pocket and nipped off the offending buttons.

Now I was dressed strictly according to regulations.

NAPOLEONS AND THE DEPARTMENT LEDGER

My name was soon entered in the Black Book.

I was lacking several textbooks, and so Mamma, my brother and I set out for them to the neighboring city of Saratov.

School had started. The first page of my school ledger had been filled in, the first pages of the textbook read, and a mass of new and important information gleaned. I felt very learned. The *Cleopatra*, a small steamer that was taking us across to Saratov, was passing the familiar shoreline of Osokorye Island, but I no longer regarded it merely as an island. It was now "a tract of land completely surrounded by water".

We bought the books I needed in Saratov and then stopped by a photographer's studio to have our pictures taken. The photographer immortalized the stiff school cap and cockade and my new shoes. Then we walked down German Street. My cap crowned my head like a saint's halo. My shoes creaked like an organ.

We dropped in at Jean's Cafe and Confectionary. Mamma ordered coffee and pastries called napoleons. It was cool and dim inside, but I could see myself in my new shoes and uniform in the large mirror. At the table opposite was a thin, stiff-backed man. He was talking to a woman at his side and looking over at our table. His eyes were as dead and dull as a fish's on the kitchen table. I stared hard at him. The napoleon got stuck in my throat, just as Napoleon had in the snows of Russia. It was our principal, Juvenal Stomolitsky.

I jumped up. My lips were sticky from the pastry and from fear. I bowed. I sat down. I got up again. The principal nodded and turned away.

Soon we rose to leave. At the door I bowed again. The day was ruined. The napoleon rumbled uneasily in my stomach.

Our class supervisor entered the classroom during the long recess the following day. He asked for my ledger. This is what he wrote on the page devoted to "Conduct and Deportment":

Pupils of secondary schools are forbidden to patronize cafes, even when accompanied by their parents.

Kuzmenko, another boy who had been left back, read the entry and said: "Good for you! You've started out right. Congratulations! Keep up the good work."

To tell the truth, I had been terrified, but his words cheered me up. I shrugged

and said: "I stuck my neck out that time. What the hell!"

From then on we called confectionaries conductionaries.

P. B. S.

The Pokrovsk Boys High School was just like every other boys school. It had cold tile floors that were kept clean by being swept with damp sawdust. There was a long corridor and class-rooms leading off it. The corridor was filled by the short incoming tides of recess and drained again by the outgoing tides of the lessons.

There was a school bell. Its pealing had a double meaning. One, at the end of a lesson, was exciting and carefree. It pealed: "Ring! Fun and da-ring!"

The other sounded when recess was over. It announced the beginning of another lesson. It was a mean old grouch: "Br-rats! I'll wr-ring your necks!"

Lessons, lessons and lessons. There was the class ledger. The Deportment Ledger. "Leave the classroom!" "Go stand in the corner!"

There were prayers and chapel. Royal days. Tunics. The gold-stitched silence of the services. Standing at attention. Boys fainting from the closeness and from the strain of standing still for two hours in a row.

The dove-grey overcoats. The dove-grey boredom. I counted the days by the pages of my ledger. It had a column for the schedule. A column for assignments. A column for marks. Each week ended with the signature of our class supervisor. Sunday alone, the shortest day in the week, did not have a space of its own in my ledger. Every other day was strictly regimented. *18. Pupils of secondary schools are forbidden to go outdoors after 7 p.m. from November 1st to March 1st. 20. Pupils are not allowed to attend the theatre, cinematograph or other places of amusement without special permission from the school inspector in each given instance. Pupils are strictly forbidden to frequent confectionaries, cafes, restaurants, public gardens, etc.*

Note: The above places of amusement in Pokrovsk include the Public Gardens Market Square and the railroad stations.

These rules were printed on our school cards, and every breach of conduct that flaunted the sacred rules meant a demerit. They say all roads lead to Rome. At the Boys School all roads led to the Deportment Ledger. Every boy's name was entered in it at one time or another. There were simple demerits: boys were left without lunch; there were reprimands and expulsions. It was a terrible book! *A secret book. A Dove Book.*

There is a legend about a *Dove Book* which fell from the skies many centuries ago and which supposedly contained all the secrets of Creation. It was a wonderful

book, something like a ledger for the planets. None of the wise men could read it all and understand it, for its secret meanings were too deep for them. We boy regarded the Department Ledger as just such a *Dove Book*, for the authorities kept careful watch over its secrets. None of us ever dreamed of reading the entries in it.

SQUABS

Unfledged doves are called squabs. We were called squabs, because of our dove grey school uniforms. Our school's Department Ledger, its *Dove Book* had the lives of three hundred squabs recorded in it. Three hundred unfledged doves trapped in a cage.

The town of Pokrovsk was once a settlement. It was a rich settlement, a grain-selling centre of Russia. Huge, five-storey granaries with turret-roofs lined the bank of the Volga here. Tens of millions of bushels of wheat were stored in this granary row. Clouds of pigeons blotted out the sun. The grain was loaded on barges. Small tugboats guided the barges out of the bay, just as a boy-guide leads a blind man.

Ukrainian tillers lived in Pokrovsk, as well as rich farmers, German colonists, boatmen, stevedores, workers of the lumber mills, the bone-meal factory and a small number of Russian peasants. In summer they became bronzed by the steppe sun, they drove camels, gathered on the water meadow on holidays which usually ended in endless fights along the river bank. They raced their boats against Saratov boats. In winter they drank heavily, had weddings and danced on Breshka Street. They ate sunflower seeds. The rich farmers met in council. Then, if ever the question of a new school, a paved road or some similar undertaking was raised, they would shout it down with their usual "resolution" of: "No need for it!"

Slush and mud were ankle-deep on the streets. Such was the state of affairs in Pokrovsk, just seven kilometres from the city of Saratov.

And then the overgrown sons of the wild and carefree steppes, these huge, bold savages from the farms, were forcibly driven into the classrooms of Pokrovsk Boys School, had their hair cropped close, their names entered in the Ledger and their bodies stuffed into the school uniform.

It is difficult, it is all but impossible to describe the things that went on in that school. There were constant fights. Boys fought singly, and one class fought another. Bottoms of long school coats were ripped off. Knuckles were cracked against enemy jaws. Among the weapons used were ice skates, school satchels, lead weights. Skulls were cracked. The seniors (Oh, those ruling classes!) would take two small boys by the legs and batter each other with our swinging heads.

True, there were some first-year boys so big they drove the fear of God into the meanest seniors.

I was rarely hit, since I was so little they were afraid they might kill me. Still and all, I was accidentally knocked unconscious two or three times.

They had their own special game of soccer that was played on empty lots with old telegraph poles or stone posts that were lying on the ground. The object of the game was to roll a pole across the lot into the other team's field, using their feet alone. As often as not, a pole would roll over some fallen players, mangling and crushing them.

During classes they cribbed and prompted each other outrageously and with great imagination, inventing the most complex and outlandish devices. Desks, floorboards, blackboards and lecterns were all rigged. There was a special delivery service and a telegraph. During written tests they even managed to get the answers from the senior classes.

Some boys, to spite the teachers, would hunch over and thus be sent to stand in a corner "to straighten up", where they persisted to cause themselves great discomfort by standing hunchbacked, although at home these were strong boys with excellent postures.

The boys chewed oilcakes in class, played cards, fenced with knives, traded lead weights, and read the adventures of Nat Pinkerton. There were some lessons during which half of the pupils were being punished and were lined up along the walls, while another quarter was out smoking in the washroom or else banished from the classroom. But a few heads bobbed above the desks.

The boys ignited phosphorus in order to produce a mighty stench. That meant the room had to be aired, which left no time for the lesson.

A squeegee would be tacked under the teacher's lectern, and when the string was jerked the toy would squeak. The teacher would rush up and down, but still squeaked. He would search the desks, and still it squeaked.

"Stand up, all of you! And stay there!"

Every boy would be on his feet, but still, the toy went on squeaking.

The inspector would be summoned. Still, it went on squeaking. The pupils would be made to sit at their desks for two hours and would miss their lunch.

Still, it went on squeaking-

The boys stole things at the market, they fought the town boys on every corner they beat up policemen. They poured every sort of mess into the inkwells of those teachers whom they disliked. During lessons they would slowly vibrate a split penpoint that had been stuck into a desk, and the screeching sound it produced would set your teeth on edge.

THE PRINCIPAL

Juvenal Stomolitsky, the principal, was tall, thin, unbending and careful! pressed. His eyes were round, heavy-lidded and leaden. That was why he had been nicknamed Fish-Eye.

Fish-Eye was a protégé of Kasso, the Minister of Education who was loathed by all. Fish-Eye valued drilling, absolute quiet and discipline above all else. As classes ended each day he would take up his station outside the cloakroom. We were to pass by him in review after we had put on our caps and coats. We had to stop as we approached, remove our caps by the visor (and only by the visor!) and bow low.



Once, when I was in a hurry to get home, I grasped the hatband instead of the visor when I doffed my cap.

"Stop!" the principal commanded. "Go back and return again. You must learn to greet me properly."

He never shouted. His voice was as dull and colourless as an empty tin can. When angry he would say: "Abominable boy!" This was his most terrible reprimand and always meant a poor mark for deportment and other unpleasantnesses in the future.

No matter whether he appeared in a classroom or in the Teacher's Room, conversation would immediately die down. Everyone would rise. A tense silence followed. The atmosphere would become so stifling you felt you wanted to open a window and shout.

Fish-Eye liked to enter a classroom unexpectedly. The pupils would jump to their feet with a great rattling of desk tops. The teacher would become red in the face, stumble in the middle of a word and look just like a schoolboy who was

caught smoking.

The principal would sit down by the lectern, making sure that each boy called on would bow to him first and then to the teacher. Once the district inspector, a little grey-haired old man with a large star on his chest, visited the school. The principal escorted him to one of the classrooms and motioned with his eyes to a boy who was being called upon to recite to bow first to the district inspector, then to him and, finally, to the teacher.

The following notations, thanks to old Fish-Eye, were to be found in the Black Book:

Andrei Glukhin was seen by the principal wearing his coat thrown over his shoulders. He is to be left after school for four hours. Stepan Gavrya ... was seen in town by the principal wearing a shirt with an embroidered collar. Six hours after school. Nikolai Avdotenko was absent from school without permission on October 13th and 14th. To be left in class for twelve hours (on two successive holidays).

(Nikolai Avdotenko's aunt died on October 13th. He had been living with her family.)

The district inspector was pleased with the way the principal ran the school. "I'm very pleathed, thir," he lisped. "Thith ith an exthemplary thchool."

THE TEACHERS' ROOM

The Teachers' Room was at the end of the corridor, to the right of the principal's office. Continents and oceans were rolled up and stuck away behind a bookcase in a corner. The huge round eyeglasses of the earth's hemisphere gazed down from a wall. The glass door of the bookcase reflected His Majesty, by the Grace of God, a blue ribbon, a carefully-groomed beard, an arrow-straight part and rows of decorations, the Tsar of all Russia. (The actual portrait of the tsar hung opposite).' The Black Book was kept in the bookcase. On top of the bookcase a lop-sided squirrel offered its shedding tail as a moustache for a goddess. The goddess was old and made of plaster of Paris. Her name was Venus. Whenever the bookcase door was opened the goddess swayed gently and seemed about to sneeze. And the bookcase was opened whenever someone reached for the Department Ledger. Caesar Karpovich, the school supervisor, was the keeper of the key to the bookcase. We had nicknamed him Seize'em and he was the butt of all our pranks. He had a glass eye, something he tried very hard to conceal. However, the moment

he turned it on us, we made faces at him and thumbed our noses.

New boys who had not yet discovered he had a glass eye admired the courage of the pranksters. Seize'em was the author of at least half of all the entries in the Department Ledger, for he was responsible for the boys' behaviour, both in school and out.



He would ambush us on Breshka Street, which was strictly off-limits. Seize'em stalked the streets after seven p.m. in search of boys still outdoors. He would come calling to see if an absent boy was really sick. He would lie in wait for boys outside the Dawn Cinema. He spent his days and nights busily tracking down culprits to provide fuel for the Ledger. Still and all, the boys managed to trick him brazenly. Once, for instance, he waylaid a group of sixth-grade boys inside the Dawn Cinema. They locked themselves in one of the boxes. Seize'em went for a policeman, and together they tried to force the door of the box. As the film flickered on the screen the boys tore down the drapes of their box, knotted them

and slide down the drape-rope into the orchestra. First to appear on the screen were a pair of dangling legs. Then the boys fell into the laps of the audience. There was a general commotion, during which they escaped through an emergency exit.

Wisps of cigarette smoke drifted about in the Teachers' Room, snaking around the globes and stuffed birds. There was a table beside the bookcase where the class ledgers were kept, witnesses of the good, bad or indifferent progress of every boy in the school. The school inspector usually leafed through them during recess.

THE INSPECTOR

The boys almost liked Inspector Nikolai Romashov. He was a well-built, handsome man who wore his hair in a short brush cut. His dark eyes were often narrowed, and he had a sharp tongue that was often rude.



He, too, followed his own educational methods. If, for instance, a given class had committed some collective crime or did not wish to hand over an offender, Romashov would appear after lessons, entering the classroom slowly and facing the boys, all of whom would stand stiffly at attention. Then, raising his head high, he would survey them. It seemed that his beard swept over the tops of our heads.

"Where's the monitor?" he would say in a chillingly calm voice. "Go over and shut the door. So."

The monitor would shut the door tightly. The boys, hungry and tired after five hours of study, would stand at attention. Romashov would continue his inspection of the class through his beard. He would then take a book from his pocket, sit down at the lectern and become engrossed in it. The boys stood at attention. For ten minutes. For half an hour.

After about an hour's reading, the inspector would suddenly put his book aside and begin his harangue in a soft but resounding baritone, speaking calmly throughout:

"Well? What have you to say for yourselves, muttonheads? Addlepatated hooligans. Dimwitted pigeon fanciers! What a brainless collection of dolts! Morons! I'll have you publicly castigated in front of the whole school, you numskulls! Pigheaded charlatans! Nitwits! Whose stupid head is that? Ah, is that you, Gavrya? I mean you, too, by the way. Why are you turning your mug away? You're the top-ranking dunce here! Well? I'll bet you feel ashamed of yourselves, you louts. Scoundrels! Idiots! I'll see you get what's coming to you, you blackguards. Here you are, left after school. And there's dinner waiting at home. Hot soup. Roast beef. I can smell the savoury sauce." At this the inspector would sniff loudly and smack his lips. "Ha! Hungry, aren't you? I'll bet you are. And you're sure to get your backsides tanned when you get home. Your fathers will see to that. I'll send a note along, telling your dads to let down your pants and give you a good whacking in the rear department ledger. There's nothing to laugh at, you lummoxes! Rattlebrained whelps! Left after school! For shame!"

After carrying on in this vein for about an hour, he would finally dismiss the class, but one at a time, with long intervals in between. We all felt faint by then.

LAMBS AND BILLY GOATS

Romashov had divided all the boys into two groups: the lambs and the hilly goats. That, too, was how he introduced the pupils of a class to a new teacher.

"Be seated, idlers! Here, you see, are the lambs, the crammers, the 'A' students, the goody-goodies. And here are the 'F' and 'D' students, the left-backs, the dinner-missers, the blabbermouths, loafers and back-benchers. Aleferenko! Shove your belly into your satchel! Look at it hanging over your belt!"

The inspector was in charge of seating the class. Thus, he had the wildest, laziest and worst pupils in the front rows. The farther back and closer to the windows, the better the marks a boy had. However, a very warm relationship based on prompting and cribbing existed all along the diagonal line between the far left "A" corner of the class and the front right "D" corner.

THE TALE OF THE AFON RECRUIT

The Black Book contained eight incomprehensible entries. These eight

mysteriously similar notations all bore the same date. The following paragraph was repeated eight times:

"(Name) of the ... grade has been severely reprimanded for the last and final time for outrageous hooliganism. His deportment mark for the term is "C" ("C—"). He is to be punished by twenty hours of compulsory schoolwork on successive holidays. His parents have been notified. (Signed)... Class supervisor. (Signed) Inspector...."

These eight entries refer to a scandalous and tragic event which in its time had the entire town up in arms. However, no one knew the end of the story or the names of the real participants in the events. There is not a word in the Black Book about Bloodhound Kozodav, the Afon Recruit or the Tavern, that third-rate joint run by Madame Kolenkorovna. Mokeich, the now-departed school janitor, divulged the sector of the Black Book to me. Here it is.

THE FIRST BELL

There were no electric bells in the city about eighteen years ago. Instead, there were wire handles on the porches, somewhat like the pull-chains of old-fashioned toilets. And you pulled the handle when you rang. Then a new doctor arrived in Pokrovsk. They said he was very much a man for modern technology and scientific development. Indeed, the doctor subscribed to *Niva*, a literary magazine, and had battery-run electric bells installed in his apartment. A little white bell-button appeared on the outside door beneath the doctor's card. The patients would press the button, at which a loud-voiced bell would suddenly come to life in the foyer. Everybody agreed this was wonderful. The doctor soon had a flourishing practice, and it became the height of fashion in Pokrovsk to have an electric bell on one's front porch. Five years later there was hardly a house with a porch that did not have a bell-button. The bells had variously-pitched voices. Some buzzed, others tinkled, still others rasped, and there were those that simply rang. Some bells had instruction notices tacked up beside the buttons, such as: "Please don't bang on the door. Put your finger on the pip for to ring the bell."

The people of Pokrovsk were proud of their cultured ringing. They spoke of their doorbells with love and interest. When meeting in the street, they would inquire after the health of a doorbell.

"Hello, Pyotr! How are you? And how's the new arrival? Did the man install it yet?"

"Yes, thanks. What a beauty! Come on over and hear it ring. It's got a voice like a canary."

When matchmakers praised a girl's dowry they would say: "She'll have her own wing of a house with a 'lectric bell on the porch."

Mlynar, the richest man in town, had seven different bells installed, one for each day of the week. The bell with the liveliest sound was for Sundays. The gloomiest-ever bells jangled on fast-days.

The Afon Recruit would be sent for whenever a bell went out of order. The Recruit doctored old bells, installed new ones and was reputed to be the best "bell man" in town. His fame was widespread, and his place in the annals of Pokrovsk was as honourable as that of Lake Sapsayevo, still the best swamp in the area, or Lazar, the best of the cabbies, who is still hale and hearty, or the granary fire, surely the best of all fires.

THE TAVERN

The Afon Recruit lived at the market place, by the meat rows that smelled of fresh blood. He lived in the Tavern, as its inhabitants called their filthy, comfortless hovel. A large pit near the Tavern was forever filled with foul-smelling puddles, and stray dogs would scrounge around there, dragging out long ropes of intestines or messes of entrails, all of which swarmed with blue-bottle flies. The market's hardware section, resounding with hammering and clanging, was a short way off.

The Afon Recruit lived in the Tavern. No one knew where he was from, how he had got his nickname or of what nationality he was. But everyone knew him. He was strong, as swarthy as a roasted nut, thin, wiry, and as agile as a pennant in the wind. He had a huge round earring in his left ear, and a long black moustache sprang from under his hooked nose. The left tip of his moustache pointed skyward, while the right pointed down, which fact made it resemble a washbasin faucet. His pearly teeth were forever flashing in a smile. His hands were forever busy, doing some piece of work or other. And his hands were of a kind called "golden hands" in Russian. He could do anything. He was a mechanic, a barber, a magician, a watchmaker—you simply had to name it.

He was the most respected man in the Tavern. Everyone followed his lead and liked him. No one could remember ever having seen him angry. Even when a heated argument led to ugly knives, the Afon Recruit's smile flashed more brightly than the blades. He would materialize between the fighters as if from thin air to shove them apart. Then, flying onto one of the bunks like a dervish, he would

shout:

"Attenshun, pu-leeze! Presenting the ver-ry latest hocus-pocus magic: black, white, striped and polka-dotted! Ladies, gents and esquires! Entendez a sec! Voulez vous have a look! Stupendous! A-mazing! Alley-oop!"

Tiny boxes and balls would come pouring out of his pocket to be juggled over his head. His hat spun on a cane which he balanced on the tip of his nose as he lit cigarettes inside his coat sleeves. A woman's voice issued from his innards, and it was singing. Meanwhile, his torn sole gaped and said "Merci". The quarrel was forgotten instantly.

Dunka Kolenkorovna, a half-wit, was the mistress of the Tavern. Kostya Gonchar, the town fool, was her favorite lodger. He was absolutely harmless, for his great joy in life was adorning his person with anything bright or shiny. He went about town in his rags hung with pictures cut out of *Niva*, the tops of tea tins, ads for various brands of cigarettes, empty lozenge tins, beads, paper flowers, playing cards, bits of harness and broken teaspoons. The townsfolk were indulgent and gave him whatever bright and useless odds and ends they had. To this very day whenever anyone in Pokrovsk is dressed too gaudily someone will say:

"Look at him! He's dolled up like Kostya Gonchar!"

Bloodhound Kozodav, the policeman whose beat was the market place, liked to drop in at the Tavern. Kozodav possessed everything an exemplary policeman needed: a pair of fierce moustaches, a badge, a whistle, a sword, a deep, gruff voice, a blue-red lump of a nose, a medal, and braided red shoulder straps, the envy of Kostya Gonchar. Bloodhound Kozodav would drop in at the Tavern to have a drink on the house, play a game of cards, and have a heart-to-heart talk with Joseph Pikus, the sage travelling salesman.

The other inhabitants of the Tavern were Levonti Abramkin, a nightman, Hersta, a German organ-grinder, his parrot that had been trained to pick out "lucky" fortune cards, Chi Sun-cha, a tubercular Chinaman, and Shebarsha and Krivopatrya, two bosom friends and petty thieves.

THE DEVIL AND THE BABES

In the evenings boys from our school would sneak into the Tavern. Here they could enjoy oilcakes, relax in pleasant company, forget for an hour or two the strictly regulated life of the school and play cards without worrying about Seize'em pouncing on them. Here no one ever asked you what your term mark for Russian grammar was or whether you had done your homework. We were always welcome. The inhabitants of the Tavern joined us in berating the school rules and

regulations, and many were quite prepared to beat up the Latin teacher for giving a boy an undeserved "F". Chi Sun-cha, who was always so reserved, would get all worked up.

"Why so bad Latin teacher?" he would say as he cut out coloured paper festoons. "Boy good. Why he get 'F'?"

We would bring the men books we thought were good, the latest news, our school lunches and junk for Kostya Gonchar. In exchange we received invaluable information in such varied fields as the art of jimmying locks, forging signatures, and the Odessa version of ju-jitsu.

The Afon Recruit was a great one for discussing a book he had read and always drew us into these discussions. In the beginning, the other men made fun of him, saying that the devil had taken on a bunch of babes, but soon nearly every other inhabitant of the Tavern was taking part in our heated debates. To top it all, Vasya Gorbyl, one of the "babes", gave Shebarsha such a beating that we were all treated with special respect from that day on. At first, our reading was limited to adventure stories. Thus, we sailed 80,000 Leagues Under the Sea, found Captain Grant's Children and nearly lost our own heads over the Headless Horseman. Then Stepan Gavrya, alias Atlantis, brought some banned political books to the Tavern. The Tavern inhabitants listened to the story of the Paris Commune with bated breath.

We schoolboys were pledged to secrecy about these visits to the Tavern.

Many of our fellow classmates had no idea where the so-called Hefty Gang hung out after school. Whenever Bloodhound Kozodav put in an unexpected appearance at the Tavern the banned books were whisked out of sight and Bloodhound was offered a drink. He would soon be in a benevolent mood and would whisper confidentially:

"Lissen, boys, don't poke your noses out for 'nother half-hour. That Seize'em's sniffing around Breshka Street. I'll give you a sign soon's all's clear."

'T WAS IN THE GARDEN....

In September the leaves began to fall and the grass turned yellow in the Public Gardens, which somehow resembled the worn fur collar of an old winter coat.

In September the boys of our school picked a fight with the town boys.

Vanya Makhas, a fifth-grade boy, was out walking with a girl from the Girls School. Some boys from Berezhnaya Street who were sitting on one of the park benches began baiting him.

"Hey, sonny! Don't you pick your girls from our street."

Makhas escorted the girl to the fountain and said: "Pardon me. I'll only be a minute. I'll be back in a sec." Then he returned to the bench, went up to the fellow and struck him, knocking him against the wire fence. The next moment the fight had turned into a free-for-all. The boys fought in silence, for there were teachers sitting on the benches of the next walk. The town boys knew this, too, and felt it unfair to shout and thus put their enemies at a disadvantage.

Some park watchmen who were passing broke up the fight, and the appearance of Seize'em on the scene put a stop to the slaughter.

That was when the town fathers asked the principal to include the Public Gardens in the list of off-limits places for schoolboys. The principal was only too pleased to comply. Thus, the boys of our school were deprived of their last recreation spot. They tried to protest, but the Parents' Committee upheld the principal's ruling.

WE'RE CHALLENGING YOU

That very day a secret emergency meeting was held at the Tavern. Hefty and Atlantis were the only two boys present.

Atlantis was boiling mad. "It's against the law! There's no place we can go anyway, and now this! I don't give a damn for this whole town any more."

"You know what I'd suggest?" Joseph said. "Why don't you send the district supervisor a telegram with a paid reply? You shouldn't be silent. Why, it's a regular ghetto for schoolboys. You can't go here, you can't go there. So where can you go?"

"Alley-oop! To hell with the telegram!" the Recruit interrupted. "No. This calls for some hard thinking. La!"

"Bash their heads in and be done with it!" Krivopatrya shouted cheerfully from his upper bunk. He was lying with his head and shoulders over the side, spitting intently, trying to send the spittle through a ring he had made of his fingers.

"That's no good. We've got to make them all suffer. Tar and feather them. They're all to blame. The Town Council and the Parents' Committee. A bunch of rotten pigs. And we have to be sure we don't get caught. Otherwise they'll expel us. It'll take a lot of brains to think of something," Atlantis said.

"The boys'll all stick together. Once we get started they won't know what hit them," Hefty added.

A silence fell. The plotters were lost in thought. Water dripped from the roof.

Suddenly Joseph jumped to his feet, smacked himself on the forehead and exclaimed: "Eureka! Eureka, which, in Greek, means 'I have the answer'! This head

has come up with an amazing idea. What?"

"For God's sake! What is it?"

"What's all this noise and commotion? Where do you think you are, at school or in a respectable tavern?"

"Are you going to tell us or not? What're you waiting for?"

"Shh! Quiet, please! My idea is a fix of an idea. It has nothing but good sides for all of us, and not a single bad side. Now listen, everybody. What is the exception of my conception? I mean, what is the conception of my exceptional idea? Now, this is what you do...." At this Joseph began cutting the air, using his thin fingers like a pair of scissors. He went on cutting the air for several minutes, then looked around at each of us in turn. His eyes shone as he spoke in a momentous whisper:

"The doorbells...."

THE MANIFESTO

Hefty chose eight fine boys from different grades for the bell-cutting campaign. First, the following manifesto was drawn up:

"Boys! The Public Gardens are now off-limits. (Be sure nobody's watching you read this!) Our enemies are Fish-Eye, the Town Council and the Parents. Which means the whole town's against us. And that means we've got to get even, and make sure they never forget it. This town will never forget what we're going to do to them. In this place everybody's proud as peacocks of their doorbells. Fellows! We of the Committee of War and Vengeance have decided to cut off all the doorbells in Pokrovsk. Each of us, on The Day, will cut off the doorbell outside his house. Our parents are on Fish-Eye's side.

"The Committee of War and Vengeance will appoint local boys to do the job in the houses where there aren't any Boys School fellows. It'll be another St. Bartholomew's Night for doorbells! Boys! Don't spare a single bell! We've been driven to this. We've been deprived of our last recreational vestige.

"The Committee of War and Vengeance has appointed the following boys to be in charge of their class. Obey their orders! In view of the danger of expulsion, we're using their nicknames.

"1st grade—Marusya

"2nd grade—Honeycomb

"3rd grade—Atlantis

"4th grade—Donder-Bong

"5th grade—Meatball

"6th grade—Satrap (The Ghost of Hamlet's Father)

"7th grade—Fishnet (I inhabit)

"8th grade—King of the Jews

"The man in charge—Hefty

"The doorbells will be handed over to the monitors. They will pass them on to the Committee that will hand them over to a cripple, who will trade them for gunpowder, bullets, pop-guns, etc. The day of St. Bartholomew's Night will be announced by the monitors. The signal to begin is a white triangle, pasted to the windowpane.

"Don't break the big bell in the Teachers' Room or they might guess who did it. If anybody rats, he'll get a bell stuffed down his throat! Down with the doorbells!

"One for all!

"All for one!

"Long live War and Vengeance!

"Sign this and pass it on, but not to Lizarsky or Dimwit.

"Cmte. for W. & V. 1915"

Copies of the manifesto began circulating throughout the school, read to the whispering of prompting during classes, amidst the jostling commotion of recess and the stale cigarette smoke of the washrooms. There were two hundred and sixty-eight coats hanging on pegs in the cloakroom. Two hundred and sixty-six signatures appeared under the manifestoes. The two boys who were kept out of it were Lizarsky, the police officer's son, and his best friend. Dimwit.

War had been declared.

THE STILLED VOICES

Five days later the ringleaders met at the Tavern. Although it was late in the afternoon, each one came carrying his heavily-packed school satchel. However, instead of the usual dull grammar books and figure-laden math books, they now contained severed bell-buttons. The white, black, grey, mother-of-pearl, enamel, yellow, stiff and worn buttons (the latter would stay depressed and keep on ringing the bell) stared out of their wooden or metal circles, squares, ovals and rosettes that were lacquered, or-rusty, of fumed or stained oak, or walnut. The wires protruded like torn ligaments.

Every family was now waiting for the Afon Recruit to call. He spent the next two weeks installing new bells, bringing the stilled voices back to life, as he was wont to say. Then, when the last button had been screwed into place, he said to

Hefty: "Your turn! You start a week from today."

The following Saturday was a muddy day. More than one rubber drowned in the puddles, more than one galosh sank on the main street of Pokrovsk that day. However, when the townspeople finally trudged home from church that evening, losing their rubbers, their way and their strength, they fumbled about outside their front doors in the darkness in vain and struck matches, cupping their hands to shield the flames from the wind. There were no bell-buttons in sight. That night everyone discovered that the new bells had been cut off.

"What's going on?" was the worried refrain the following day at Mass, on the street corners, at the front gates and on the benches outside the houses. "Good Lord! In bright daylight, too! It's highway robbery. Maybe they've got a whole gang at it."

"Imagine! I mixed the dough and set it out to rise. Then I went outside for a breath of air and to have a chat with my neighbour. Grinya was doing his homework. Well, we talked for a bit, and I went back. I wanted to close the front door and, gracious! There was no doorbell. And not a soul in sight, mind you."

The poor woman could never imagine that her dear son Grinya, a snub-nosed fifth-grade boy, had cut off the button.

THE ZEMSTVO INSPECTOR AND SON

The town was in the dumps. No one attempted to have a new button installed. The schoolboys were jubilant. Outside every front door a bright circle or square with holes where the nails had been gaped forlornly.

The Zemstvo inspector was the only one to summon the Afon Recruit. "Go on, put in a new one!" he said. "Go on, you scoundrel. And make sure it's screwed on tight this time! I know your kind." And he shook his finger.

The Recruit cast a guarded look at him.

"Don't play the innocent. I know you. You barely stick it to the wall, so's the brats can pry it off quicker. I know you bums. They get them off, and a black thief like you shovels in the profits. But you won't get away with it this time! I'll post policeman here. I'll have a man on duty round the clock."

The Recruit installed a new button and hurried back to the Tavern, where the boys were waiting for him.

"I just put in a new pip for the Zemstvo Inspector. Don't touch it. He'll have bloodhound there day and night."

"To hell with all coppers!" Venya Razudanov, alias Satrap, and the Zemstvo inspector's own son, shouted belligerently. He was stocky and stubborn, a true

copy of his father, and that was how he had got his other nickname, the Ghost of Hamlet's Father.

"Wait a minute, my militant boy," Joseph Pukis said. "What kind of an aplombic tone of voice is that? Stop and think. You may have to part with your school cap instead of another doorbell. Why spit in the wind? Caution above all."

"That's right, Satrap. You got to be careful. If you get caught, I'll take care of you good." At this Hefty held his monstrous, mallet-like fist up to Satrap's face.

As always, his fist was admired and discussed at length. Everyone tested it and exclaimed:

"Boy, that's some fist! Look at the size of it!"

"In these days a good-sized fist is better than a so-so head," Joseph philosophized.

"Big, good fist," Chi Sun-cha exclaimed. "Boswain fist like so. Ah! Lot of h teeth."

"I'll cut off the button anyway!" the Zemstvo Inspector's son muttered.

A CHAPTER USING FILM TECHNIQUE, IN WHICH THE READER, GLIMPING FEET ON TOP AND HEADS BELOW, MIGHT SHOUT: "WATCH THE FRAME!"

It was as black as pitch.

Then, as our eyes became accustomed to the dark, we made out a door with plaque on it. It read: "G. V. Razudanov, Zemstvo Inspector." Beside it was new bell-button. We were on the second floor landing and could see a stretch of staircase. Down below under the stairs was a head with a lumpy nose and long moustaches, topped by a cap with a cockade. It was Bloodhound Kozodav. I-was cold. He shivered. He raised his collar. He kept blinking. His eyelids dropped. Kozodav was dying to sleep.

The clock in the dining-room of the Zemstvo Inspector's house struck two. On the table were a sandwich on a plate and a glass of milk, left out for someone.

There were steps on the stairs. It was the sound of muddy rubbers. One foot stumbled on a tread. "Dammit! It's as dark as hell."

A match flared. A hand in a kid glove held the match to the bell-button. Another match was struck and went out, and then another.

"The Recruit really did his damndest!"

Kozodav's head was somewhere down below. Above it were a pair of feet

shod in shoes and rubbers.

Kozodav, who had dozed off for a minute, came to his senses and clumped up the stairs hurriedly. "Got you this time!" he bellowed. He was heaving mightily, and his moustache bristled as he raised a whistle to his lips. He grabbed the intruder by the collar with his free hand and whistled. "Help! Murder! I got'im!"

The intruder turned calmly and brushed the policeman's hand from his collar with a regal gesture. It was Venya Razudanov, the Zemstvo Inspector's son. He was more than indignant. "What's the matter with you, you fool? Can't you see who I am?"

"I'm s-s-sorry! I d-didn't recognize you in the dark. I'm awfully sorry. I thought it was someone creeping up here after the bell."

The door opened. The Zemstvo Inspector, wearing his wife's dressing gown and carrying a double-barrelled shotgun, emerged onto the landing. The sleepy-eyed, frightened faces of his wife, sister-in-law and maid peeped out from behind him.

"What's going on here?"

Kozodav snapped to attention, his hand frozen in a salute. Venya was the one to explain.

"This idiot was sound asleep on his feet and decided I was a burglar, Papa. And he missed whoever it was that got the bell."

All eyes were now on the door jamb. There were torn wires and nail holes where the bell button had so recently been. Then everyone turned to Kozodav. He went up to the door, unable to believe his eyes. He ran his hand over the spot and shrugged. The Zemstvo inspector shook him by the collar and yelled: "Get out, you idiot! You let him get away!"

Venya, meanwhile, was playing the part of a hurt, insulted boy. "I'm so tired, Mamma. I spent half the night studying. And this is what I came home to...."

The next scene concerned the family alone. There was a kiss for the poor boy. Fade-out. In other words, the end of the chapter.

The brightly-polished bell button made a bulge in the pocket of Venya's overcoat.

BLOODHOUND SUMMONS JOSEPH

"I want those bell-snatchers caught! Hear me?" the police officer said to Kozodav. "You've become the laughing-stock of this whole town! If you catch them, you'll get a fifty-rouble bonus. If you don't, I'll make things so hot for you, you'll cook to a frizzle!"

Bloodhound threw himself into the job.

He was walking through the market. No, he was not walking, he was sailing. The red braiding of the shoulder straps which adorned his powerful shoulders rose and fell like oars in the human stream of the market. There Kozodav came upon Kostya Gonchar, the Tavern simpleton. He was wandering about the market, looking as festive as a Christmas tree. Two new acquisitions gleamed on his belly: a shiny ad for Triangle Galoshes and ... a large red rosette with a bell-button in the centre. At the sight of the bell-button Kozodav made a beeline for Kostya. He promised to give him his fine red shoulder straps, gold tassels and anything else he wanted if Kostya would tell him where he had gotten the bell. And Kostya beaming brightly, told him all he knew.... He said he had stolen the bell from under the Recruit's bunk.

"The Recruit hid it, but I felt around and found it. There's lots more there! One an' twenty times more, an'...."

At which Kozodav promised him a thousand other glittering treasures. Kostya brought him a torn copy of the Manifesto issued by the War and Vengeance Committee. The ringleaders were as good as caught. In order to get all the other Bloodhound decided to tempt Joseph, too. He dropped in at the Tavern, sat down on Joseph's bunk, and cleared his throat politely.

"Ah, sir honourable policeman," Pukis said. "So you want to see me? What *a* I do for you?"

Bloodhound moved closer, looked around and nudged Joseph. "You sure are tricky one, Joseph! Why don't you just tell me how you and the Recruit cut off t] bell? I won't tell a soul. I just want to hear how you did it. Come on, quit pretending."

"I don't understand you one bit." Joseph's face, which had been placid, took' a surprised look. "Though I'm Joseph and you're a policeman, I don't know h< you dreamed this up."

Kozodav pulled out his wallet and rustled the crisp notes inside. Joseph cor nued unperturbed:

"And besides, and I hope you won't take offence, I think, sir honourable policeman, that you're a great honourable scoundrel!"

Kozodav shook his fist at him, slammed the door and was off. He soon came to a halt and took the Manifesto from his pocket. The top and the bottom had been torn off, but the list of monitors was intact. He pondered over it a while, then tore Satrap's name out of it and said to himself: "The Zemstvo Inspector'll give me a fiver for this scrap of paper, or his sonny-boy'll be expelled, too." He set his cap on straight and headed towards the precinct and from there to the Boys School, to see the principal.

STEPS IN THE CORRIDOR

The monotonous wind cooled the puddles like tea poured into a saucer. The telephone wires hummed. At ten a.m. the switchboard operator connected the precinct station with the green-papered office beyond the Teachers' Room by way of these windblown, humming wires. The principal, as sallow-faced as the green wallpaper of his office, and as slow-moving and joyless as dictation, cranked his telephone, sat back in his armchair, removed the receiver and raised it to his ear.

"Hello," he said.

Lessons were in progress. Half an hour later every classroom heard two men walking down the corridor. Their steps were loud and alien. The one whose gait was slow and heavy wore boots that squeaked. The other tinkled and jungled at every step. The boys listened intently. They raised their heads from their notebooks, ponies, cracks in their desks, banned books and trump cards. Anxious eyes were fixed on the doors.

EXPOSE

The third grade was having a math test. Once again all became still in the corridor outside. Pens scratched. Hefty had made a mistake in a problem and couldn't get the answer right. The steps in the corridor had made him nervous. Stepan Atlantis, whose heart had also skipped a beat, saw that his chum was having trouble and sent him the following note: "Relax. Fish-Eye isn't a man-eater."

But he was, as far as they were concerned. The classroom door opened. There was a rattle of desk tops as the boys rose. Seize'em entered, beaming foully and twirling his key chain. The key on it was the key to the bookcase where the Black Book was kept.

"Stepan Gavrya! Go to the principal's office!" he commanded.

Atlantis towered over his desk. He looked dazed.

"Hurry up!" Seize'em said. *"And take your books."*

An anxious hum filled the classroom. He was to take his books! That meant was leaving for good. He wouldn't be coming back.

Hefty waited. He had lowered his head, as if to ward off a blow, but Seized said nothing to him. Bloodhound Kozodav, being vary of Hefty's fists, had torn his

name off the list, too.

Atlantis' hands shook as he got his books together, put them in his satchel and then headed towards the door. On the way out he slipped Hefty a rolled-up scrap of paper. Atlantis stopped in the doorway. He was about to say something, but Seize'em shoved him out. The boys waited in tense silence. The math teacher wiped the foggy lenses of his spectacles nervously.

Hefty unrolled the scrap of paper. It contained the solution to the problem, done step-by-step. Even in this last moment Stepan had come to his friend's aid. He sat there motionlessly for a minute with his head lowered and his eyes on his desk. Then he rose quickly, swayed, filled his broad barrel chest with air, glowered and said in a voice that was a statement, not a question:

"May I leave the room."

"There's only ten minutes left till the end of the lesson," the teacher said.

"May I leave the room?" Hefty exhaled stubbornly and stepped into aisle.

"Well, if you really can't wait."

The stunned boys watched Hefty stuff his books into his satchel and lumber towards the door, satchel in hand. A terrible silence settled over the third grade.

Hefty did not look back. He went straight out, into the empty corridor, and once there he suddenly felt very small and doomed. And he heard, coming from behind the closed door, a shriek of laughter rise up over the desks, the inkwells and lectern amidst the shocked silence of the boys he had left. Then it changed into a gurgling scream. It was little Petya Yachmennyy in the first row who had become hysterical from the tension. Hefty threw back his shoulders and stalked towards the principal's office.

EIGHT BOYS

Kozodav was breathing heavily. He was breathing heavily and poking his finger at the boys lined up in front of him. "Yes, sir! This one's Honeycomb, and this one's Atlantis. That's their nicknames."

The other man was rocking back and forth in a tilted chair. His spurs jingled and he twirled his small black moustache. "Well, well.... Such conspirators! Well, well, boys."

The seven of them stood stiffly before the desk. There were only seven, since the Zemstvo Inspector's son was missing. The soot of misery and despair was settling on their faces.

"So. Indeed," the principal said curtly, and his voice sounded as if a twig had snapped. "I thank you. Well, you wretches, what have you to say for yourselves?"

For shame! For shame! It's disgraceful! Who else was in on this with you? Oh, so you won't tell? Miserable creatures. You're no more than a bunch of thugs. You'll all be expelled. You're a disgrace to the school emblem. Nothing you can say will change matters. I want to see your parents. I'm very sorry for them. Having sons like you is enough to break a parent's heart. You scoundrels."

The seven raised their eyes and heaved a collective sigh. Indeed, there were their parents. They could expect their mothers' tears. And scolding. And their fathers' chairs being pushed back in anger. Perhaps even a cuff. Their dinners would be getting cold on the table. "You'll end up being a stevedore!" And the empty days stretching on ahead.

Then the King of the Jews said rudely, "Let's not bring our parents into this. It's bad enough as it is."

"Silence! Do you want to be blacklisted for good?"

Just then Hefty entered. He leaned a hand on the edge of the desk, and the desk creaked. Moving his jaw slowly, he seemed to be chewing his words as he said, "I'm in on it, too. I'm the ringleader."

"Well. You can consider yourself dismissed. You're also expelled."

Eight overcoats were missing from the cloakroom now.

Eight boys trudged across the muddy square, their feet dragging in the ooze. They were bent under the weight of their school satchels and misfortune. They looked back at the school a last time and one of them, it was Hefty, the boys in the classroom saw it was he, shook his fist angrily at the building. Everyone in the school who had seen them wanted to shout, pound their fists on their desks, turn over the lecterns and catch up with the eight boys outside. But the boys in classrooms were pupils, and pupils were not allowed to make any noise or express comradely feelings until they were permitted to do so by the bell, which measured out their portions of freedom.

Penpoints scratched across paper and left many a blot.

PUKIS THE BENEFACTOR

While the fifth lesson of the day was in progress, Joseph Pukis, his face very grave, entered the deserted corridor. The janitor was busy washing the floor Joseph greeted him politely. He spoke beseechingly.

"Mr. Janitor! I really have to see the principal. It's a matter of life and the contrary."

The principal saw Joseph in the Teachers' Room. He was in a hurry. "Yes? What can I do for you? Um.... I don't have very much time."

"Mister Principal, Sir, I'm an old wandering Jew, and I can see the happiness of a family man in your face. I'll bet anything that your children will never go barefoot or wanton."

"Get to the point! I have no children. And I have no time to waste, either."

"Just one little minute, Sir. You expelled eight boys today. And I ask you, what did you expel them? But do I have a right to ask you? No! A thousand times no. But I have a kind heart. And when you have a kind heart, you have to speak up. I'm very sorry for those boys. And I'm still sorrier for their parents, who nursed and upbrought them. Sir Principal, you don't have any children. May God give you children. You don't know how oh-oh-oh terrible it is when your boy comes home and...."

"That's enough!" The principal rose. "This conversation is senseless. The exit is over there."

"Just one little minute more!" Joseph cried, grabbing the principal's sleeve. "But do you know that all those bells, the devil take them, were cut off by all your pupils? How many boys are there in the school?"

"There were two hundred and seventy-two until today," the principal replied despite himself.

"Well, at least two hundred and sixty of them did the cutting. How do you do that? And what if I tell you that your best pupil, the son of the honourable Zemstvo Inspector, may he live to be a hundred, also did the cutting, and even a lot better than many of the others? The police only showed you a piece of it." Joseph took out the complete Manifesto and handed it to the principal. The principal paled. There on the sheet of paper were the signatures of the boys of all eight grades. He pointed to a chair contemptuously and said, "Sit down ... please."

Then Joseph told him of his terms. The eight boys were to be reinstated. The police would search the Tavern and would find the bells. The Afon Recruit would lie low for a while. He had agreed to this. The townspeople would think that the scoundrels from the Tavern had cut off the bells, and in this way the boys would be exonerated. That would put an end to the scandal. If, on the other hand, the principal did not reinstate the boys, the very next day the entire town, the entire region and the entire school district would discover what was going on under the roof of the Pokrovsk Boys School and what the sons of some Zemstvo inspectors were up to.

"All right. They'll be reinstated, but their names will be entered in the Ledger." He pulled out his wallet. "How much do I owe you for this ... for this, and to ensure your silence?"

Joseph jumped to his feet. Joseph leaned across the desk. Joseph said, "Sir! You don't have to pay me, Sir. But I swear by the memory of my mother, may she rest in peace and quiet, that the time will come when you'll be repaid by me and by

us, and by those eight boys who went off like whipped dogs, and you'll be repaid with good interest!"

Thus ends the saga of the Afon Recruit.

"FS" AND "D'S"

After the doorbell scandal life at school seemed to have resumed its natural course. There were fewer bloody brawls, fewer rows and less thieving. However, the rules became still stricter.

Seize'em was forever shaking the plaster foundations of Antiquity when he unlocked the bookcase to get the Department Ledger and disturbed the aged Venus.

Pupils were absolutely forbidden to be seen on or near the railroad platform and the Public Gardens. Paralysing, grey boredom oozed over from one day to the next, from one page of our books to the next. The Department Ledger was a sword that hung over our heads. Rows of boys being punished would be lined up along the walls during classes. The pages of the class journals filled up with broken fences of "F's" and big fat "D's".

ROACHIUS, THE QUESTION MARK

Veniamin Pustynin, the Latin teacher, who was nicknamed Roach Whiskers for his long, bristling moustache (or, Roachius, to give it a Latin ending) sowed "F's" and "D's" with a vengeance. He had another nickname as well, one our class usually used, and that was Crookneck.

Roachius was thin and had a long nose, and really did look like a crook. Above his stiffly starched winged collar he had an extremely long neck that swayed from side to side just like a big question mark. And so, wherever he went, Roachius would find a big question mark. It would be staring at him from the blackboard, the lectern, the seat of his chair, the back of his coat, the door to his house. The question marks would be erased but would reappear the following day. Roachius would turn pale, lose weight and fill our notebooks and report cards with "F's".

He had a passion for little notebooks in which we were supposed to write down Latin words. Whenever he called on a pupil he demanded that the boy come up to the blackboard with his little Latin notebook.

"So," he would say. "I see you've learned the lesson. Now let's have a look at your notebook. I want to see what new words you've put down. What? You left it

at home? And you dared to come up to the blackboard without it? Go back to your seat." And he would give the boy an "F".

No amount of pleading helped. It was an "F", and that was all there was to it.

There were two boys in my class whose last names were similar: Alekseyenko and Aleferenko. One day Alekseyenko left his hateful notebook at home. Roachius entered the classroom, sat down at the lectern, put on his pince-nez and said softly:

"Ale ... ferenko!"

Aleferenko, whose seat was behind Alekseyenko, rose and went to the front of the class, while Alekseyenko, who in his terror had decided that his name had been called, jumped to his feet and mumbled in a rolling bass, "I forgot my notebook...." He stopped short, for he had suddenly noticed Aleferenko approaching the lectern, and cursed himself for being such a fool. Roachius calmly dipped his pen into the inkwell. "Actually, I called on Aleferenko, but since you've confessed your guilt, you'll get what you deserve." And he gave him an "F".

THE HISTORY TEAM

The bell rang, bringing recess to an end. The noise in the classroom died down. He was coming!

The boys rose in a body.

The history teacher was coming. He had fine blond hair parted down the middle, a very young, pale, thin face and huge blue eyes. His head was tilted slightly in a kindly manner. His collar was snow-white. Kirill Ukhov burst into the classroom and tossed the class journal onto the lectern.

The boys stood at attention.

Ukhov looked them over, rushed over to the lectern, then into one of the aisles and crouched down. Suddenly his blue eyes flashed. His high-pitched voice rose to a shout: "Who! Dared! To sit! Down! I haven't said ... 'Be seated'. Get up and stay up! And you! And you, too! And you! Wretches! All the others, be seated. Hands on your desks. Both of them. Where's your other hand? Stand up and stay up! And you, over to the wall! Right there! Well? Silence! Whose desk creaked? Shalferov, was it yours? Get up! Silence!"

Fourteen boys stood all through the lesson. The history teacher expounded on ancient kings and famous steeds. He kept fixing his tie, his hair, his cuffs. A gold bracelet glinted under his left cuff. It was the gift of some legendary noblewoman.

Fourteen boys were standing. The lesson dragged on and on. Their legs became numb. Finally, Ukhov glanced at his watch. The gold lid clicked shut. Some of the boys by the wall cleared their throats tentatively.

"Caught cold?" Ukhov inquired with concern. "Monitor, close the window, there's a draught."

The monitor closed the window. The lesson continued. The punished boys continued to stand by the wall, shifting their weight from one foot to another. Then, after having glanced at his watch several times, Ukhov would suddenly say: "All right, team, be seated."

The bell always rang exactly a minute later.

AMONG THE WANDERING DESKS

Our French teacher's name was Matryona Martynovna Badeikina, but she insisted we refer to her as Mathilde Martynovna. We never argued the point.

She called the first-to-third grade boys "polliwogs", the third-to-sixth grade boys "dearies" and the senior boys "gentlemen". She was definitely afraid of the polliwogs. Some of them had moustaches as wild as the weeds on an empty lot, and their voices were so deep and fearful they frightened the camels on the street. Besides, whenever a polliwog came up to the lectern to recite a lesson, the smell of home-grown tobacco was so strong on his breath it nearly made poor Mathilde sick.

"Don't come any closer!" she would wail. "The smell, pardon, is overwhelming."

"It was the tomato pie I had," the polliwog would explain politely. "The smell's because I'm burping."

"Ah, mon dieu! What has the pie to do with it? You're absolutely drenched in nicotine."

"Oh, no, Matryona ... I mean, Mathilde Martynovna! I don't smoke. And, uh ... please, pooejekiteh la class?" (*This should have been "Pui-je quitte la class?"*)

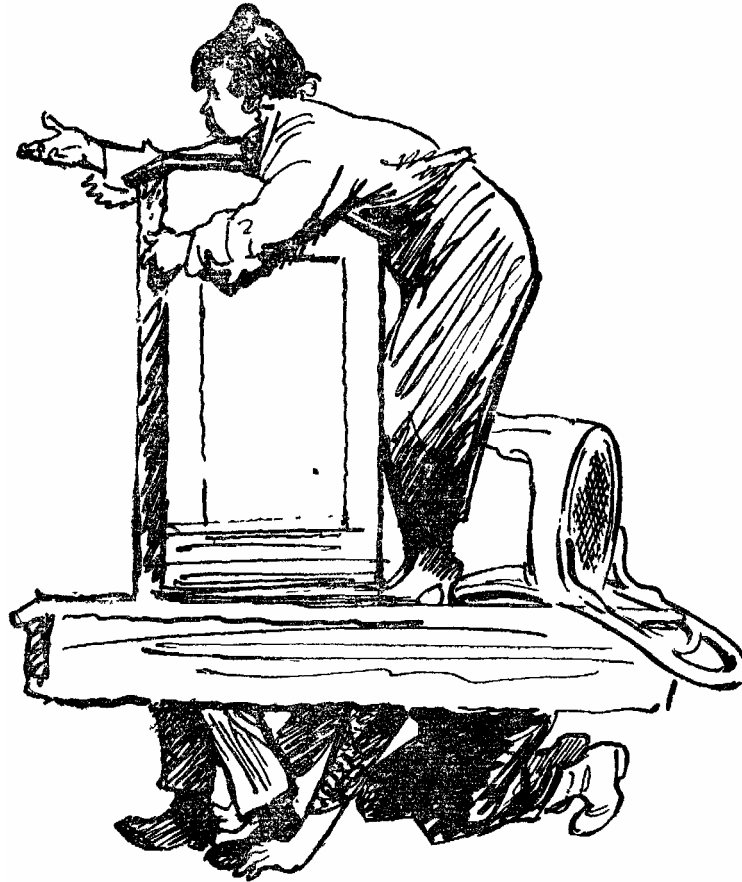
This would melt Matryona's heart. One had only to ask for permission to leave the room in French for her to beam happily. Actually, we thought she was too sensitive. If anyone wrote some obscenity in French on the blackboard, or tacked a dead rat to the lectern, or did anything else in jest, she would always get offended. She would enter it in the class journal, get all huffy, cover her face with her ham and just sit there saying nothing. And we would be silent, too. Then, at a sign from Hefty, the desks would begin to close in on the lectern slowly. We were great at coasting around in our desks, with our knees raising them and our feet moving along the floor. When all the boys grouped around her in a semicircle, we would chant softly:

"Je vous aime, je vous aime, je vous aime."

Matryona Martynovna would take her hands from her face and see the desks all around her. Then Hefty would rise and say in a deep, touching, chivalrous voice:

"Pardon, Mathilde Martynovna! Don't be too hard on your polliwogs.... Haw Scratch out what you wrote in the journal or we won't let you out."

Matryona would beam and scratch it out.



The boys would then beat a solemn tattoo on their desk tops. The back n would play taps. The desks would retreat.

However, we soon tired of declaring our love to the mam'-selle and so, instead of "je vous aime" we began saying "Novouzensk", which sounded just like it. In fact, when we chanted it, you couldn't tell the difference. And so poor Mathilde went on imagining that the boys all loved her, while we were chanting the name a nearby town.

However, it all ended sadly. Other objects besides our desks soon fell prey to < wanderlust. Thus, a large bookcase once set out down the corridor, and Seize'em's galoshes glided out of the Teachers' Room. However, when a lectern, with He and a friend under it to provide motor power, reared up just before a lesson a galloped around, the principal's spirit took a hand in the table-tilting and the t culprits had

their names put down in the Black Book, while the rest of the class was made to stay after school for two hours and miss their dinners.

HIS ROYAL MAJESTY'S BIRTHDAY

Looking through the classroom windows that morning we could see the fluttering red, blue and white slices of the flag.

It was a red-letter day on the calendar, marked by the notation: "His Royal Majesty's Birthday."

The cracked bell of Pokrovsk's Peter and Paul Church rang out:

"An-ton! An-ton! An-ton!

And a lit-the ring and bong-bong,

And a lit-the ring and bong-bong."

There was a special service at the school at eleven o'clock.

The boys were lined up in pairs. The stiff, silver-stitched edges of our high collars cut into our necks.

All was still. There was a smell of incense in the air. It was very close. The priest, the very same one who hit the boys over the head with the Bible during Bible classes as he admonished them, saying "Stand up straight, you dolt!" was now solemnly reading the service in a nasal voice. He was dressed in glittering robes for the occasion. The choir sang. The small, hairy precentor scurried up and down.

We were to stand stiffly at attention for two long hours. We could not so much as move a muscle. My nose itched, but I dared not scratch it. Our arms had to be in line with the seams of our trousers. All was still. It was hot and stuffy.

"Long life to the Tsar! Glo-ory to him!"

"Bozhenov's going to be sick, Nikolai Ilyich."

"Shhh! Not a word! He wouldn't dare!"

"Glo-oo-ry to him!"

"Honest, Nikolai Ilyich. He can't hold it in any more. He's going to...."

"Shhh!"

All was still. And suffocating. My nose itched. This was discipline. Hands and arms in line with your seams. The second hour was drawing to a close.

"Go-oo-d save the Tsar!"

The principal took a step forward, and it seemed that he had fired a child's popgun when he cried: "Hooray!"

"Hoo-ra-aa-ay!"

The walls shook. The principal again cried:

"Hooray!"

"Hooraa-aa-ay!"

And once more. Heave-ho, all together now!

"Hooray!"

"AA.-.aghh...."

"Nukolai Ilyich! Bozhenov's throwing up all over the floor!"

"God save the Tsar...."

Bozhenov was carried out. He had fainted. The service was over. Now I could at last scratch my nose and unbutton the top button of my stiff collar.

SCIENCE KNOWS MANY MITACS

We had always known, from Annushka having told us, that "science knows many mitacs". This was the secret formula for guessing a card trick, and it always helped you to pick the right pair. Which meant that science was indeed all-powerful and did know many ... uh... mitacs. But no one knew what a "mitac" was. We looked for the word in the encyclopaedia, but although we found "Mitau" (with a notation: "see Jelgova"), we couldn't find a trace of "mitac".

I next learned of the significance of science in school. However, the overwhelming of science was not proved as conclusively to us there as it was in Annushka's card trick. Science, as dry and undigestible as sawdust, rained upon us from the lectern, powdering our heads generously in the process. None of the teachers could tell us anything definite about the mitacs. The second-year pupils suggested I ask the Latin teacher.

"Where did you hear that word?" he asked, playing for time, for Roachius was a very conceited man.

The big boys fell silent, waiting to see what would come next.

"Our cook said..." I began amidst the general uproar.

"Go stand in the corner till the bell rings," he snapped, turning beet-red. "Thank God the curriculum does not call for the study of pots and pans. Stop up your spout, you moron!"

And I stopped up my spout. I realized that the school curriculum was not intended to satisfy, as they then said, our spiritual requirements.

In search of the truth I once again fled to the wide open spaces of Schwambrania. The main character of our arithmetic book, modestly known as "A man". the very same one who had bought $25 \frac{3}{4}$ yards of cloth at 3 roubles a yard and had then resold it at 5 roubles a yard, was losing a lot of money, because *of* Schwambrania. And two travellers, one setting out from point A and the other from

point B, could never meet, because they were wandering about in Schwambrania. However, the population of Schwambrania, represented by Oska, greeted my return with joy.

A PLACE ON THE MAP

Having returned to the Big Tooth Continent, I immediately set out to carry out some reforms. Firstly, Schwambrania had to be given a definite place on the map. We found a good spot for it in the Southern Hemisphere, in the middle of the ocean. Thus, whenever it was winter in Pokrovsk, it was summer in Schwambrania, or the only kind of game that is any fun is one that takes you far away to another clime.

Now Schwambrania was firmly set on the map. The Big Tooth Continent was situated in the Pacific Ocean to the east of Australia, having absorbed some of the islands of Oceania. Its northern borders, reaching as far as the equator, had a flourishing tropical flora, while its southern borders were frozen wastelands, lying in close proximity to the Antarctic.

I then shook the contents of all the books I had ever read onto the soil of Schwambrania. Oska, who was determined to keep abreast, was busy learning new words and confusing them terribly. No sooner would I come home from school than he would draw me aside and whisper:

"I've got news for you! Jack went to Camera, to hunt chocolates, and a hundred wild Balkans attacked him, and started killing him! And just then Miss Terracota started smoking. It's a good thing his faithful dog Sarah Bemhardt saved him just in time."

And it was up to me to figure out that Oska meant the Cameroons, not camera, cannibals, not the Balkans, and cachalots, not chocolates. It was easy to guess that he had confused Sarah Bemhardt and a St. Bernard dog. And the reason he called the volcano a Miss was because I had told him about emissions of rocks.

THE ORIGIN OF SCOUNDRELS

We were growing older. The letters of my script had firmly taken hands, and my lines were now as even as rows of soldiers. Now that we were a bit older we became convinced that there was very little symmetry in the world, and that there were no absolutely straight lines, completely round circles or flat surfaces. Nature, we discovered, was contradictory, imperfect and zig-zagged. This state of affairs

had come about as a result of the constant battles being waged by the forces of nature. The jagged contours of the continents were a reflection of this struggle. The sea battered into the mainland, while the continents thrust their fingers into the blue locks of the sea.

The time had come for us to review the borders of Schwambrania. Thus, a new map was drawn up.

That was when we noticed that all struggle was not confined to the realm of geography. All of life was ruled by some sort of struggle, which hummed in the hold of history and propelled it. Even our own Schwambrania became dull and lifeless without it. Our game became as uneventful as a stagnant pond of water. At that time we did not yet know what sort of a struggle powered history. Living in our cosy apartment, we had no chance to discover anything about the great, all-consuming struggle for survival, and so decided that every war, every overthrown government, etc., was no more than a struggle between good and evil. It was as simple as that. That was why we had to put several scoundrels in Schwambrania to liven things up. Bloodthirsty Count Chatelains Urodenal became the chief scoundrel of Schwambrania.

At the time all the magazines carried ads for Chatelain's Urodenal, a popular patent remedy for kidney and liver stones. The ads carried a picture of a man racked by pain, with the pain depicted as pincers gripping the unfortunate's body; or else, there was a picture of a man using a clothes brush to brush a huge human kidney. We decided that these would be considered the crimes committed by the bloodthirsty count.

THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Although the rooftops belonged to the real world, they were high above the dull earth and were not subject to its laws. The roofs were occupied by Schwambranians. Up and down the steep sides, over the attics and eaves, I set off on my dizzying journeys. I could travel the length of a block by going from roof to roof and never once touch the ground. It was wonderful to watch the sky at twilight as I lay on the cooling iron roof, between the chimney and the birdhouse pole. The sky was so close as it drifted by overhead, and the roof drifted off into the clouds. The starling on duty was whistling on the mast. The day, like a great ship, was sailing into evening, raising the red oars of sunset and casting shadows as pointed as the tips of an anchor into the yard.

However, no one was allowed to be out on the roofs. The janitor and his broom guarded the heavenly approaches. He was vigilant and unbending.

People who lived in other houses and saw me thundering across their roofs would shout: "Shame on you! A doctor's son gallivanting over the rooftops!" Actually, I could not understand why a doctor's son was doomed to crawl on the ground. But the confounded label of "doctor's son" was a killjoy, a ball-and-chain that forced us to be goody-goodies.

One day the janitor tracked me down. He came crashing over the iron roof after me. I wanted to jump into the next yard, but someone had unleashed a vicious-looking mutt there. In another yard the owner was standing outside in his long Johns and a vest. He said he would guarantee "an earboxing and scolderation". Just then I noticed a ladder leaning against an adjoining roof. I stuck my tongue out at the janitor and escaped across the third yard.

PLAYING STICKBALL IN THE LILACS

The little yard I found myself in was full of lilac bushes in full bloom, which made it seem as though everything in sight was covered with lavender froth.

I heard someone approaching lightly from behind. A smiling girl with a long golden braid came running out of the garden. She was carrying a jump-rope. She stopped and stared at me. I backed away towards the gate.

"What made you run like that?"

"The janitor."

The girl had dancing dark eyes that looked like the black India rubber balls we used for playing stickball. I felt that I had to bat a long one, but I couldn't run. The rules of the game said that you'd surely be blocked if another player stood opposite.

"Are you afraid of janitors?"

"I don't want to waste my time on them!" I said in a deep bass voice. "Actually, I spit on them, through my teeth and over my shoulder." And I stuck my hands into my pockets.



The girl looked at me with awe. "What do you mean by over your shoulder?"

I showed her how it was done. We were silent for a while. Then the girl said, "What grade are you in?"

"The first."

"So am I." She beamed.

We were silent again.

"One of the girls in my class can wiggle her ears. We all envy her," she said.

"That's nothing! There's a fellow in my class who can spit and hit the ceiling. He's this big! He can lay you flat with his right hand tied behind his back. And if he hits a desk top with his fist he can crack it. Only they won't let him do it. Otherwise, he sure as anything would."

We were silent again. An organ-grinder began playing a mournful song. I looked around the yard in search of a topic for conversation. The house was sailing through the sky. A large kite with a rag tail shot over the roof, dipped, straightened and tugged away as it soared higher still.

"My buckle will never get yellow," I said to my own surprise, "because it's nickel-plated. If you want to, you can touch it." I unbuckled my belt and held it out to her. The girl touched the buckle politely. I became bolder, took off my school cap and showed her where my first and last names had been written in indelible ink inside the hatband to make sure it would not get lost. The girl read my name.

"My name's Taya. My full name is Taisia Opilova. What do they call you short? Lenny?"

"No, Lelya. Glad to know you."

"Lelya? That's a girl's name!"

"It is not. Lola is."

We thus became acquainted.

THE FIRST SCHWAMBRANIAN GIRL

From then on I, a free son of Schwambrania, climbed down the roof into lilac valley each day. Taya Opilova was fated to become the Eve of Schwabrania. Oska was dead set against it. He said he wouldn't take a girl into the game for all the pastries in the world. True enough, there had not been a single girl Schwambrania until then. I tried to make him understand that in any s respecting book fair maidens were always kidnapped and rescued, and that r they could be kidnapped and rescued in Schwambrania, too. Besides, I ha wonderful name for the first Schwambranian girl: Countess Cascara Sagrada, daughter of Count Cascara Barbe. I had borrowed the name from a back cove *Niva* and recalled that it had been described as "mild and gentle". Oska fin had to agree, and so, little by little, I began introducing Cascara, meaning Taya the customs and ways of Schwambrania. At first she couldn't understand what was all about, but then gradually came to know the history and geography of Big Tooth Continent. She was sworn to secrecy.

I finally conquered her heart when I put on my cardboard epaulettes and said I was going off to war with Piliguinia and would bring her back a trophy.

I returned from my Piliguinian campaign the following day and galloped along the roof, carrying my trophies: two cream-filled pastries. One for her and one me. Oska had had a bite of mine.

I jumped off the wall and froze in my tracks. A strange boy dressed in uniform of the Cadet School was walking up and down in the garden with Taya. He was much older and taller than I. He had real shoulder straps, a real bayonet in a holster, and was terribly stuck-up.

"Ah!" he said at the sight of me. "Is this your Schwambroman?"

Taya had told him all about it.

"Look here, you civilian boy," the cadet said in a very superior tone of voice.

"How could you have given a young lady such a disgusting name? You know what Cascara Sagrada is? It's, pardon the expression, constipation pills. You filthy civvy! Anybody can tell you're a doctor's sonny-boy."

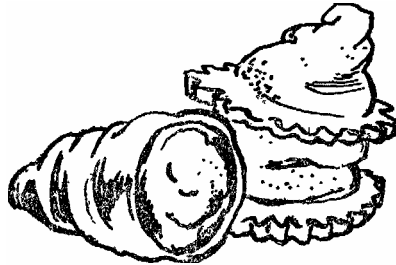
This was the last straw.

"Once a cadet always a cad!" I shouted and scrambled up the roof. I threw half of the pastry at the cadet and then ate the other pastry and a half.

I stretched out on the roof. I was very upset by what had happened. The starling on duty was whistling overhead. I sailed away to Schwambrania, proud and lonely, and the day, like a great ship, sailed into evening. The sunset raised its red oars, and shadows as pointed as the tips of an anchor fell upon the yard.

"To hell with everything!" I said.

But this did not apply to Schwambrania.



THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES



THE THEATRE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS

A battle was raging in the house. Brother was set against brother. The disposition of warring forces was as follows: Schwambrania was in Papa's consulting office and Piliguinia was in the dining-room. The parlour was the battle-field. The stockade for prisoners of war was in the dark foyer.

Naturally, as the elder brother, I was a Schwambranian. I was advancing, protected by the armchair and a clump of potted rubber plants and rhododendrons. My brother Oska had dug in behind the Piligunian threshold of the dining-room. He was shouting:

"Bang! Zing! Zing! I shot you dead twice, but you keep on crawling. I say fins!"

"No, not fins! It's called a truce! And anyway, you didn't shoot me dead, you just grazed me through."

Klavdia, a girl from next door, was pining away in the foyer, that is the stockade. She had been invited over especially to be a prisoner-of-war and was, in turn, a Schwambranian or a Piligunian Army nurse.

"Will you let me out of prisoner-of-war soon?" she said timidly, for she had become very bored sitting around in the dark doing nothing.

"Not yet!" I shouted. "Our glorious forces have completed an orderly retreat to

pre-established positions under the overwhelming pressure of enemy forces." I had borrowed the sentence from the newspapers. The daily frontline dispatches were full of fine-sounding, vague expressions which were used to conceal various military setbacks, losses, defeats and routs, and all together they went under the grand heading of news from the "theatre of military operations".

The glossy pictures in *Niva* portrayed fine, well groomed troops ceremoniously carrying on a picturesque war. The generals' impressive shoulders bore gilded clusters of epaulettes. Their tunics heaved with galaxies of glittering medals. The brave Cossack hero Kuzma Kriuchkov was shown accomplishing his great feat over and over again on pictures in calendars, on cigarette boxes, post cards and candy boxes. He was shown defeating a troop, a squadron, a whole regiment of Germans, and always with a lock of hair curling out from under his rakishly tilted cap. Each school service ended with a special prayer for the truly Christian troops. We schoolboys wore patriotic tricoloured scarfs as we sold little Allied flags in the streets, putting the coppers in collection boxes and proudly saluting the trim officers.

The war eclipsed everything. "Louder the victory march! We are victorious, and the enemy is on the run!" There were notices and manifestoes everywhere. "The original has been signed by His Imperial Majesty." The war, that great, beautiful, magnificent war, had captured our minds, our conversation, our dreams, our games.

The only game we played was war.

The truce had ended. My troops were battling at the approaches to the foyer. Annushka, who was a neutral, suddenly appeared on the battle-field, demanding that Klavdia be released immediately, because her mother was waiting for her in the kitchen.

We all said "fins", which meant a truce, and ran to the kitchen. Klavdia mother, who was our neighbour's cook, always had a puffy, swollen face. She was seated at the kitchen table. A grey envelope was lying in front of her. She greeted us and picked it up gingerly, saying, "It's a letter from your brother, Klavdia." Her voice sounded strangely anxious. "Ask the young man to read it to us. Dear Lon I hope he's all right."



I saw the sacred postmark: "From the Army in the Field". I accepted the envelope solemnly. My fingertips filled with awe and excitement. It was a letter from over there! A letter from the front lines! "March along, my friends, to war, hussar bold and daring!"

I began reading in a bright, excited voice: "Dear Mother, I'm not going to send this letter myself, because I was badly wounded, and my right arm was amputate above the elbow...."

I was thunderstruck, I could not continue. Klavdia's mother screamed. Her dishevelled head fell upon the table top and she sobbed loudly. I wanted very much to console her somehow, and myself, too, for I felt that the reputation of the war had been badly damaged by this close scrape with gore, and so I said hesitantly:

"He'll probably be decorated for this. Maybe he'll get a silver medal. May he'll even get a St. George Cross."

Somehow, I felt I had not said the right thing.

A VIEW OF THE WAR FROM THE WINDOW

A dull algebra lesson was in progress. Our math teacher was sick, and his classes had been taken over temporarily by the dullest of all possible excise tax clerks who was dodging the draft. His name was Gennady Alexeyevich Samlykov, and soon nicknamed him Old Nag.

Soldiers of the 214th Regiment were drilling on the square outside the school.

Their marching songs and the shouted commands of their officers drifted through the open windows, confusing the algebraic formulas. "Hey, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty, Madrid and Oporto!" they sang. "Line up! Count off!"

"Curly, curly, curly ringlets, little Curlylocks, you're mine!" "Hup-two-three-four! Left! Keep your line straight!" "Come when the bugle calls, brave men to battle!" "Watch your feet! Where the hell d'you think you are? Stand up straight!"

"Yes, Sir!"

"Charge!"

"Ra-aa-aaay!"

This loud, rending "hooray" burst forth from their gaping mouths and straining throats in a hoarse, salivary roar. Their bayonets sunk into the dummy. Twisted strands of straw burst from the torn sack of a belly.

"Who's that looking out the window? Repeat what I just said, Martynenko."

Huge Martynenko, alias Hefty, tore his eyes from the window and lumbered to his feet.

"Well, what did I just say?" Old Nag persisted. "So you don't know? Well, what is the squared sum of two cathetuses?"

"It's ... uh...." Hefty mumbled and suddenly winked at us and said: "It's right face ... count off ... plus doubled ranks."

We all burst out laughing.

"You get an T for that! Go stand by the wall!"

"Yes, Sir!" Hefty snapped and did a military turn at the wall. We all grinned. Our penpoints screeched.

"Leave the room immediately, Martynenko!"

"Parade step ... eyes on the lectern ... down the hall... march!" Hefty rasped.

"This is abominable!" Old Nag shouted as he jumped to his feet. "I'll put your name down in the Ledger! You'll be left after school!"

"Curly locks, curly locks...." a snatch of song drifted in through the window. "What the hell do you think you're doing? You're to stand at attention with a full pack for three hours.... Curly locks, curly locks...."

FIRST GUN, ACHOO!

Cr-rack! went something inside the wood-burning stove behind the blackboard. Cr-rack! Bang-bang! One of the boys, knowing Old Nag's fear of guns and shooting, had put some cartridges inside the tiled stove. The teacher blanched as acrid fumes seeped into the room. He ran behind the blackboard, stepping on what seemed to be a crumpled piece of paper. The boys held their breath. Bang!

The paper exploded, making Old Nag jump a yard off the floor. No sooner had the sole of his other shoe come down again than it caused another explosion. The boys, convulsed with silent laughter, began sliding off their seats to disappear under their desks. The enraged teacher turned to face the class and saw no one. Not a soul. We shook from the laughter under our desks.

"Scoundrels!" Old Nag screamed. "I'll put you all down!" He tiptoed cautiously towards the lectern. The soles of his shoes were smoking. He picked up his snuff box, a true friend in hard times, but since he had unwisely left it on the windowsill in the corridor for a moment before the lesson had begun, we had long since added a pinch of gun-powder and pepper to it.

Old Nag's quivering nostrils drew in the fiendish mixture. For a moment he just stood there. His mouth was wide open and his eyes seemed to be popping out of his head. Then a terrible, earth-shattering sneeze shook his body.

Once again the classroom became inhabited. Our laughter made our desks shake. Then Hefty raised his hand and said, "Second gun! Fire!"

"Ah-ah-choo!" the unfortunate Old Nag compiled.

"Third gun...."

"Pshoo! Ah!"

The door opened unexpectedly. We rose, as the principal entered. He had been attracted by the sound of the shooting, our ribald laughter and the teacher's hysterical sneezing.

"What's going on here?" His voice was steely as he took in Old Nag's crimson face and the angelic countenances of the rows of boys.

"They.... Oh! Ah!" Old Nag attempted to speak. "Pshoo! Ah!"

At this point the monitor decided to intercede. "He just keeps on sneezing, Sir!"

"I haven't asked you for an explanation!" The truth of the matter began to dawn on him. "Insufferable wretches! Come to my office, Gennady Alexeyevich."

Old Nag stumbled along after the principal, sneezing all the way.

He did not return to the classroom.

We had got rid of Old Nag for good.

THE CLASS COMMANDER AND THE COMPANY SUPERVISOR

"There's a smell of gunpowder in the air!" the grown-ups were saying and shaking their heads.

The smell of gunpowder snaked through the classrooms, making them

inflammable. Every desk became a powder magazine, an arsenal and storeroom. Each and every day there were new entries in the Department Ledger.

"The school inspector has taken from Vitaly Talianov, a fourth-grade pupil who attempted to run off to war and was apprehended at the pier, a Smith and Wesson revolver and bullets, and a tea kettle he stole from the ragman, who has identified it. His parents have been notified.

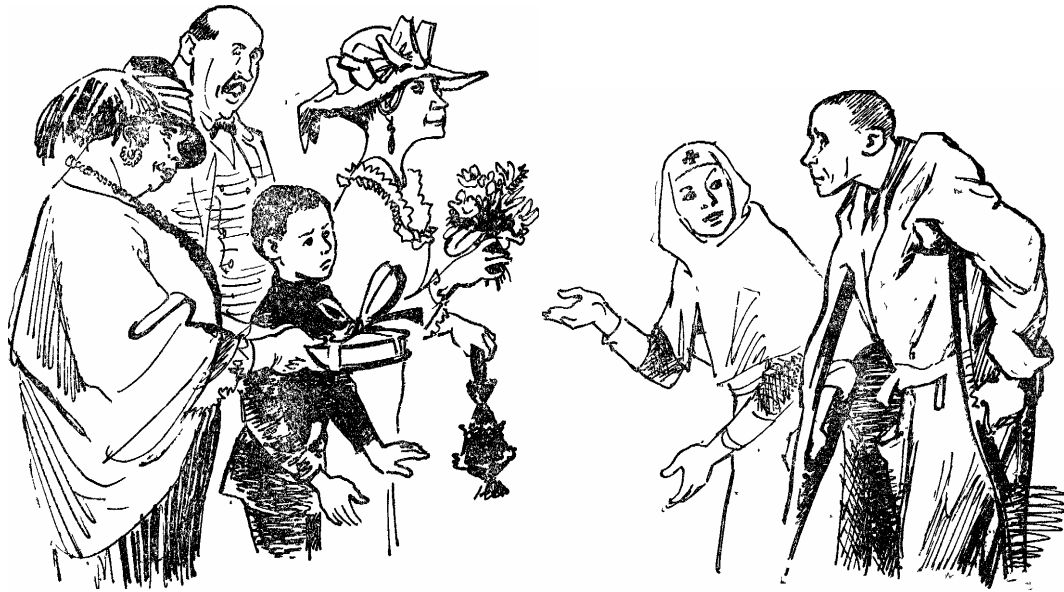
Nikolai Shcherbinin, a second-grade pupil, was found to have concealed in his desk: one officer's shoulder strap, a sword knot, a package of gunpowder and a hollow metal tube of unknown purpose. His satchel contained: a piece of a bayonet, a toy revolver, one spur, a soldier's tobacco pouch, a cockade, a beanshooter and a hand grenade (discharged). He has been left after school twice for three hours each time.

"Terenti Marshutin, a fifth-grade pupil, fired off a home-made gun during the lesson, breaking a window and fouling the air. He insists it was an accident. He has been expelled for a week."

The boys rattled when they walked, for the pockets of each were full of cartridge shells. We collected them on the firing range beyond the cemetery. The wind played tick-tack-toe among the graves. The rabbit-ears of the windmills protruded from behind the hill. An Army camp languished on the small plain. The 214th Infantry Regiment was displaced in wooden barracks there. The wind carried the smell of cabbage soup, cheap tobacco, boots, and other glorious aromas of the army's rear guard.

The pupils of the Pokrovsk Boys School and the privates of the 214th Infantry Regiment had established firm business ties and were carrying on a brisk trade. We passed our sandwiches, cucumbers, apples and various other civilian dainties through the barbed-wire fence of the camp, and in return received such coveted items of army life as empty magazines, buckles, cockades and torn shoulder straps. Officer's shoulder straps were especially prized. Sidor Dolbanov, an N.C.O., traded me a tar-specked lieutenant's shoulder strap for two ham sandwiches, a piece of chocolate and five of my father's Triumph cigarettes.

"I'm giving you this real cheap," he said during the transaction. "I'm only doing it because you're a friend of mine. The way I see it, you schoolboys are doing your hitch just like us. They make you wear uniforms and drill, too. Right?"



Sidor Dolbanov was a great one for discoursing on education. "Except that military science takes a lot of brains, so's you can't compare it to your schooling," he philosophised as he wolfed down our sandwiches. "Yes, sir, this isn't 'rithmetic or algebra, or any such like. You tell me this if you're so smart: how many men are there in a regiment?"

"We didn't study that yet," I said, feeling very embarrassed and not knowing the answer.

"That's what I mean. What about your class commander, boys? Is he a mean old bitch?"

"He's very strict. He'll make you stand by the wall, put your name down in the Black Book or keep you hours after school for nothing at all."

"What a louse! Which makes him just like our company commander."

"Do you have a company supervisor, too?"

"No, he's no supervisor, he's a bitch of a commander. He's hell on wheels, that's him, Lieutenant Gennady Alexeyevich Samlykov." "Old Nag!" I gasped.

SOLDIER BOYS

The older boys of. our school were strolling down Breshka Street with some junior lieutenants. Although it was against school rules, an exception had been made for our glorious Army officers. Soldiers saluted them. The older schoolgirls who helped roll bandages made eyes at them. We were green with envy.

One day the school inspector entered our classroom during a lesson. His beard

looked kindly and reverential,

"The first contingent of wounded from the front lines has just arrived. We are going to welcome them. You there, in the back rows! I'm talking to you! Tutin! I'll leave you after school for an hour, you dummo! Now, as I was saying, the entire school will go out to welcome our glorious soldiers who ... ah ... have suffered so, defending the tsar and the Christian faith. In a word, line up in pairs! And I want you to behave properly outside, you cutthroats, savages, jailbirds! Anyone who doesn't will be sorry he was ever born."

The streets were crowded and ablaze with tricoloured flags. The wounded were being transported, one man to a vehicle, in the decked-out carriages belonging to the town's wealthy citizens, with an aristocratic lady from the local philanthropic society dressed as an Army nurse supporting him. The procession resembled a wedding train. Policemen saluted it.

The wounded were put up in a new dispensary housed in a former primary school. The flustered ladies were in charge there. A gala concert was to be held in one of the large wards. The wounded men, freshly-shaven, washed, perfumed, surrounded by pillows and boxes of candy, sat in embarrassed silence, listening to the bombastic speeches of the town fathers. Some of the men were holding crutches that had been adorned with bows.

Shvetsov, a fourth-grade boy, recited a poem entitled "Belgian children". Six second-grade boys were lined up behind him to accompany his recital with various tableaux. The Zemstvo inspector's daughter played "The Skylark" by Glinka on the piano. The wounded fidgeted and seemed uncomfortable. The last to perform was the town druggist, an amateur poet and tenor. Then a tall young blond soldier rose from one of the cots and cleared his throat shyly.

"Speech! Speech!" everyone shouted, applauding loudly.

When the noise finally died down, the soldier said, "I'd like to say.... Doctor, Sir, and ladies and gentlemen, and nurses, and everybody else. Uh, we're very grateful to you for all this, for everything, but we'd rather, I mean, we've been travelling for three days and three nights, and we haven't had any sleep, and that's what we really need."

THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

Soldiers were being flogged in the barracks. One officer called another an Armenian mug at the Officer's Club, and the insulted man shot the offender point-blank, killing him on the spot. By now the wounded were being brought in any which way and dumped wherever there was available space.

Then our forces took Peremyshl. A crowd of shopkeepers, shady characters from the suburbs and a few officials walked through the streets with a portrait of the tsar like an icon at the head of the column. They infected the air with howling tricoloured flutterings and the sour stench of raw liquor. It was quite as if some celebration were being warmed up over a spirit burner.

Once again the school inspector went from classroom to classroom carrying his solemn, parted, victorious beard as majestically as if it were a gonfalon.

We poured out onto the porch of the school building to greet the demonstrators and, at a signal from the principal, we cheered. There was something disgusting about the bellowing crowd of demonstrators. It seemed that they needed but a little push to start rioting and killing. We felt as if a mindless, suffocating, insurmountable force was engulfing us. It was like being on the bottom of a pile during a free-for-all, squashed under a great, crushing, suffocating weight, unable to expand your lungs to cry out.

However, it all ended without incident, not counting a call that night to my father, to save the life of a "patriot" who had got drunk on wood alcohol.

The demonstration made an indelible impression on Oska, that great confuser of things, imitator and day-dreamer, who always managed to find a new meaning for each object, seeing in each its second soul. His great passion at the time was an old toilet seat. First, he stuck a samovar pipe through the hole and made believe it was a Maxim machine-gun. Then he put the toilet seat on his hobby horse, and it served as a yoke. Though this was not exactly in the best of taste, still, it was permissible. However, the day after the demonstration Oska organized a Schwambranian demonstration in the yard, and this one was truly blasphemous. Klavdia had attached someone's long drawers with ties at the ankles to a floor brush to serve as a gonfalon. Oska carried the ill-fated toilet seat, which now served as a frame for the portrait of the tsar, Nicholas II, Ruler of all Russia, which he had cut out of a magazine.

The indignant janitor handed the demonstrators over to Papa and threatened to inform the police, but was quickly pacified by a tip.

"Children are very sensitive to the spirit of the times," the grown-ups said meaningfully.

The spirit of the times, an offensive spirit, seeped into everything.

WE RECEIVE MILITARY TRAINING

That winter the boys of our school and the girls of the Girls School were all taken to the Army camp to be shown a mock battle. It was a cold, snowy day.

A colonel explained the battle to the ladies of the philanthropic society. The ladies warmed their hands in their muffs and oh-ed and ah-ed, and whenever a shot was fired they clapped their hands to their ears. However, the battle was very unimpressive and certainly did not resemble the battle scenes pictured in *Niva*. Black shapes were crawling across the field. Fires dotted the scene, blending to produce a smokescreen. Then other fires were lit. We were told these were signal fires.

From a distance the cross-firing, as it advanced along the lines, sounded like a pennant flapping in the wind. The stench of the trenches was overpowering.

"They're attacking," the colonel said.

The dark shapes were running and shouting "Hooray!" very matter-of-factly.

"The battle is over," the colonel said.

"Which side won?" the spectators inquired, having understood nothing.

The colonel was silent for a moment and then said: "That side." Then he looked up and warned everyone: "The bomb-thrower is about to go into action."

Indeed, it did and very loudly at that. The ladies became frightened, the cabbies' horses bolted, and the cabbies cursed in the direction of the sky.

The battle was over.

The company that had taken part in the action passed in formation, led by a sly-looking junior lieutenant. When they came abreast of us the soldiers burst into a dirty song with a practiced air, some of them whistling shrilly and straining their cold throats.

The girls exchanged glances. The boys roared. One of the teachers cleared his throat. The fat headmistress of the Girls School became indignant.

"Lieutenant!" the colonel shouted. "What's going on? Stop the singing."

Bringing up the rear, stumbling in boots that were much too large and becoming entangled in the long flaps of his great-coat was a small, puny soldier. He tried to keep in step, hopping and skipping to keep up, but still fell behind. The boys recognized him. He was the father of one of the poor boys.

"Hey, look at that dopey soldier! His son's in the third grade. There he is!"

Everyone laughed. The little man picked up the flaps of his greatcoat and set off at a trot as he tried to catch up with his company. His head bobbed at the end of his long neck. His son stood on the sidelines, staring at the ground. His face was covered with red blotches.

Oska was waiting for me impatiently when I got home, for he wanted to hear all about the battle.

"Was there a lot of shooting?"

"I never knew war wasn't one bit nice at all," I replied.

A DAPPLED GREY

The year was drawing to a close. It was vacation time. On December 31, 1916, our parents went to a New Year's party. Before leaving, Mamma explained to us at length that "New Year's is not a children's party at all, and you must go to bed at the usual time".

Oska tooted a sailing signal and sailed off to Schwambrania for the night. Meanwhile, my friend and classmate Grisha Fedorov came to visit me. We cracked nuts and played lotto for a while. Then, having nothing else to do, we went fishing in Papa's fishbowl. Finally, we got bored of this, too, turned off the light, sat down by the window and, after warming the pane with our breath, made little holes on the frozen glass and looked out into the street.

The moon was shining, and dull blue shadows lay across the snow. The air was full of powdery, brilliant glitter. The street seemed magnificent.

"Let's go for a walk," Grisha said.

However, it was against school rules to be seen out on the street after seven o'clock in December. Our supervisor Seize'em would go out hunting schoolboys each night, stomping up and down the streets to find them.

I immediately imagined Seize'em pouncing on us from behind some corner, his gold eagle-crested buttons glittering as he shouted:

"Silence! What's your name? Stand up straight!"

Such an encounter was nothing to look forward to. It meant a poor mark for deportment and being left behind in an empty classroom for four hours after school. Perhaps there would even be something else in store as a New Year's surprise. Seize'em was a great one for such things.

"Don't worry, he's probably at some New Year's party himself," Grisha said.

"He's probably stuffing himself someplace."

It didn't take much coaxing for me to give in. We put on our overcoats and dashed out.

The town's small hotel and the Vesuvius Restaurant were both located not far from our house. That evening the Vesuvius seemed to be erupting. Streams of light poured forth from the windows, while the earth trembled from the dancing within.

At the hitching post outside the hotel we saw an elegant high sleigh with a velvet seat and a fox-lined lap rug. The runners were of figured iron. A large dappled grey horse was harnessed to the curved lacquered shafts. It was Gambit, the famous pacer and the best trotter in town. We had no trouble recognizing both the horse and the carriage, for they belonged to Karl Zwanzig, a very wealthy man.

"WHOA" IN GERMAN

At that moment I had a wild idea.

"You know what, Grisha?" I said, turning cold at my own boldness. "Let's go for a ride. Zwanzig won't be ready to leave for a long time. We'll just ride as far as there and around the church, and back again. I know how to drive."

I didn't have to say it twice, A minute later we had unhitched Gambit, climbed up onto the high velvet seat and wrapped the furry rug around our legs,

I picked up the firm, heavy reins, clicked my tongue as cabbies did, cleared my throat and said in a deep voice: "Giddiyap! Go on, boy!"

Gambit turned, rolled a large eye at me and looked away. I even imagined he had shrugged contemptuously, if horses did such things.

"I bet he only understands German," Grisha said. Then he shouted: "Hey! Fortnaus!"

This made no impression on Gambit, either. Finally, I smacked him hard with the twisted reins. The very same second I was thrown back. If not for Grisha, who caught me by the belt, I would have sailed right out of the sleigh. Gambit surged forward and was off. He hadn't bolted. He was trotting swiftly as he always did, with me grasping the reins tightly as we sped along the deserted street. What a shame that none of our friends were there to see us!

"Let's call for Atlantis. He lives right around that corner. We still have plenty of time," I said and tugged at the left rein. Gambit turned the corner obediently. There was Atlantis' house.

"Hey, there! Whoa!"

But Gambit did not stop. No matter how hard I pulled at the reins, the pacer paid no attention to me. He kept on trotting swiftly. Atlantis' house was soon left far behind.

"Let's not call for him, Grisha. He's not much fun. Let's call for Labanda instead. He lives over there." I had wound the reins around my hand in advance and now braced my feet against the front board.

But Gambit did not stop outside Labanda's house either. I was beginning to worry.

"Listen, Grisha, do you know what to do to make him stop?"

"Whoa! Stop!" he shouted as loudly as he could. We pulled on the reins together.

However, the powerful pacer paid no attention to our shouts or to the pull of the reins. He kept trotting faster and faster, racing us along the dark streets.

"He doesn't understand Russian!" Grisha said in a scared voice. "And we don't

know what 'whoa' is in German. Nobody ever taught us that. You know, he'll just keep on going. We can't stop him."

"We don't want to ride any more! Stop!" we both shouted.

But Gambit kept on stubbornly.

HORSE WORDS

I tried to recall everything I knew about talking to horses and everything I had ever read about it.

"Whoa! Stop, boy! Come on, dove!"

But, as ill luck would have it, I kept thinking of expressions the likes of which could only be found in some saga, things such as: "0, you wolf's repast, 0, you sack of grass" or, worse still, expressions to make a horse go faster: "Git up!... Let's see some life in you!... Here we go!"

Having used up my vocabulary of horse words, I tried some camel words. "Tratrr, tratrr... chok, chok!" I shouted, imitating the camel drivers.

But Gambit did not understand camel talk.

"Tsob-tsobeh, tsob-tsobeh!" I croaked, recalling the Ukrainian ox-cart drivers.

That didn't help either.

The bell on Trinity Church began to strike One, two, three times.... It struck twelve times.

That meant we had ridden into the New Year. Were we just going to go on driving down the streets like that for the rest of our natural lives? When would the confounded horse stop?

The moon shone down on us mysteriously. The stillness of the empty streets, where one year had just ended and another had just begun, seemed menacing. Were we doomed to riding in this sleigh forever?

I had become panic-stricken.

Suddenly, two rows of highly-polished brass buttons glinted in the moonlight, appearing from around a corner. It was Seize'em. Gambit was racing straight at him.

I dropped the reins in terror.

"Silence! What's all the noise about? What's your name? Stand still, stupid!" Seize'em shrilled.

Then a miracle happened.

Gambit froze in his tracks.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

We tumbled out of the sleigh, raced around the horse and, drawing abreast of the supervisor, tipped our caps politely, grasping the patent leather visors with our fingertips to bare our unruly heads as we bowed low to Seize'em, saying: "Good evening, Seize ... Caesar Karpovich!" in unison. "Happy New Year, Caesar Karpovich!"

Seize'em drew his pince-nez slowly from a case which he took out of his pocket and settled the lenses on the bridge of his nose.

"Aha!" he beamed. "Two friends. I recognize you! Lovely, just lovely! Excellent! Magnificent! Now we'll just write both your names down." At this he took his famous notebook from the inner pocket of his overcoat. "We'll write down both names. First one, then the other, and they'll both be left after school as soon as vacation ends. Four hours each, and no dinner. Four hours for one, and four hours for the other. Happy New Year, children!"

Then Seize'em stared at the sleigh. "One moment, boys. Have you Herr Zwanzig's permission to take his sleigh? Hm?"

We interrupted each other in our haste to assure him that Herr Zwanzig had actually asked us to take Gambit for a run to warm him up a bit.

"Excellent," he murmured. "We'll all go back together now and see whether you are telling the truth or not. Come."

The very notion of finding ourselves in the fiendish sleigh again was so terrible that we suggested he ride alone, promising to walk along beside him.

The unsuspecting supervisor clambered up onto the high seat. He tucked the luxurious fur rug around his legs, picked up the reins, yanked them and clicked his tongue. When this had no effect, he let the reins fall lightly on Gambit's bad that very moment we were tossed aside. Clumps of snow flew into our faces. When we had brushed the snow from our eyes and shaken the snow off our clothes the careening sleigh was just disappearing around a bend, with our unfortunate supervisor hanging on for dear life and bellowing something unintelligible.

Meanwhile, Herr Karl Zwanzig, Gambit's owner, came pounding around another corner. His coat was unbuttoned and his tie was askew. He was roaring the top of his voice: "Help! Morder! Poleez! Shtop dem!"

We could hear a police whistle in the distance.

We never tried to find out how it all ended. Seize'em never said a word of the night's adventure when we returned to school after our vacation.

Thus did the New Year begin. It was now 1917.



THE LEDGER FOR FEBRUARY



ALL ABOUT THE ROUND GLOBE, IMPORTANT NEWS AND A SMALL SEA

Mamma and Papa had just gone visiting. The front door slammed. The draught made the doors fly open all through the house. We heard Annushka turn the light off in the parlour. Then she went back to the kitchen. There was an eeriness in the quiet that settled on the house. The clock in the dining room ticked loudly. The wind rattled the windows. I sat down at the table and pretended to be doing homework. Oska was drawing steamships. There were very many of them, each had smoke pouring from its stacks. I took his red-and-blue pencil and be colouring the pronouns in my Latin book, making all the vowels red and all consonants blue. Suddenly Oska said,

"How do people know that the Earth is round?"

I knew the answer to that question, because it was on the first page of geography book, and I went into a long explanation about a ship sailing far. away until it disappeared completely beyond the horizon. Since you couldn't sit any longer, it meant the Earth was round.

My explanation did not satisfy him.

"Maybe the ship sank? Huh? Maybe it just sank."

"Don't bother me. Can't you see I'm doing my homework?" I continued colouring the pronouns.

All was silence again.

"I know how people know the Earth's round."

"I'm glad you do."

"Well, I do! It's because the globe is round. There!"

"You're a round-headed ninny, that's what."

Oska pouted. Trouble was brewing. Just then the telephone rang in our fat consulting room. We raced to be the first to get there. The office was dark, deserted and scary. I turned on the light. The room immediately changed its appear;

like a developed negative. The windows had been light, but now they became dark. The panes had been black, and now they were white. Most important, however, office no longer frightened us. I picked up the receiver and spoke in Papa's sc voice:

"Hello?"

It was our favourite Uncle Lyosha, phoning from Saratov. He had not been us in ages. Mamma had told us that he had gone very far away, but Oska had eavesdropped and learned that, strangely, he had been put in prison for against the tsar and the war. Now he had apparently been released. That was news!

"When are you coming to see us?" we shouted into the phone.

"I will soon," he replied, and I could hear him chuckle. "I want you Mamma and Papa that I phoned and said there's been a revolution in R There's a Provisional Government now. The tsar's abdicated. Repeat what I he said to me, and he sounded excited.

"How did it happen?" I shouted.

"You're too little to understand."

"No, I'm not! Not if you tell me. I'm in the third grade."

And so our uncle, speaking from Saratov on the other side of the Volga, went on hurriedly to explain the meaning of the war, the revolution, equality and fraternity to me.

"Are you all through speaking?" a voice interrupted. "Your time is up."

Click! We were disconnected. I stood there, feeling as if I had suddenly

become about three years older, feeling that I was about to burst from excitement.

I glanced at Oska. He seemed terribly embarrassed. "Shame on you! What's the use of you knowing the Earth's round?"

"I held in all the time you were talking. It was an accident."

I ran to the kitchen. Annushka had a visitor. He was a wounded soldier she knew, a man who always looked sullen. There was a small silver St. George Cross on his chest. I shouted excitedly:

"Annushka! First of all, there's been a revolution, and freedom, and no more tsar! And, secondly, Oska wet his pants. Find him another pair." I related everything my uncle had just told me. Then Annushka's soldier-friend stood up. His left arm was in a sling. He embraced me with his right arm. I was stunned. He squeezed me hard as he said:

"That's the best piece of news you could have brought us! I can't even believe it." Then he shook his big fist at someone outside the window and added, "You'll get what's coming to you now! Our time's come!"

I looked at the window, but saw no one. Meanwhile, the soldier was saying,

"Pardon me, young man, but this is the best news I've ever heard. Why.... Good Lord.... Thanks a million!" He sounded as if there was a lump in his throat.

A DIRECT LINE

I went to the dining-room, got up on a chair and knocked on the brass cover of the stove's air duct. It served as a direct line to Anna and Vera Zhivilsky who lived upstairs and whose stove was directly above ours. If I knocked on the cover of our duct they could hear me. I could hear Anna's voice in the duct.

"Hello!"

"Hello, Anna! I have some great news! There's been a revolution, and there's a soldier here right now."

"You don't know what I have! Guess."

"Has there been another revolution someplace?"

"No! My godmother gave me a set of doll dishes, and it even has a creamer."

I slammed down the receiver... that is, I slammed the brass lid shut. No, they would never understand. I put on my fur hat and coat quickly and ran to my friend next door. My Latin homework would have to be done some other time.

SEIZE'EM CHASES THE MOON, OR WHAT THE

LEDGER SAID OF THIS

There was a smell of spring in the air. The sky was studded with stars that glittered like the buttons on the school inspector's tunic. I dashed down the deserted street. The moon ran along beside me like a dog, stopping at each and every telegraph pole. The houses all had their shutters closed tight. How could people be sleeping at a time like this? After there had been a revolution! I felt like shouting at the top of my voice.

Two rows of gleaming brass buttons were floating towards us. It was Seize'em The faithful moon and I turned and fled. The moon hid behind the poles and fences, while I tried to keep well within the shadows they cast. Alas! He had spotted me.

"Stop! Stop, you scoundrel! Police!" he shrilled. But he had not called my name, and that meant he had not recognized me. I kept on running. The moon and Seize'em followed close behind. He was my enemy, but the moon was my ally.

It darted behind a roof, the better to conceal me.

I was mistaken. Seize'em had recognized me. The next day the following entry was made on my page in the Department Ledger:

"Seen by the inspector out on the street after 7 p.m. Did not stop running despite having been ordered to."

The moon was not mentioned.

THE SOLDIER SAID: "AT EASE!"

Oska and I escorted Annushka and her soldier-friend into the parlour and marched up and down, with Annushka's red kerchief tied to Papa's walking stick. The soldier shouldered Oska's toy rifle and brandished it as we all sang:

*Up and down the mountains
Did a schoolboy go,
Shouting, "Down with that old tsar!"
His red flag waving so.*

There was a wonderful smell of polished army boots in the parlour. My brother and I and the soldier had become the best of friends. He let each of us lick the paper of his home-rolled cigarette.

Oska fidgeted as he sat on the soldier's lap. Finally, he said: "Who's strongest, a whale or an elephant? What if they have a fight? Which one'll win?"

"I don't know. Tell me."

"I don't know, either. And Papa doesn't know, and Uncle doesn't know. Nobody knows."

We discussed the whale and elephant problem for a while. The soldier and I said the elephant would win, and just to be spiteful, Annushka said the whale would. Then the soldier went over to the piano, sat down on the stool and tried to sing *The Marseillaise*, accompanying himself by hitting one single note.

Annushka finally realized it was way past our bedtime.

"At ease!" the soldier said and we tramped off to bed.

OSKA'S SELF-DETERMINATION

Moonbeams had marked the floor of our room off into hopscotch squares. We might actually have played in them. But we were lying in our beds, talking about the revolution. I told Oska whatever I had learned from our uncle and also what I had read in the newspapers about the war, the workers, the tsar and the pogroms.

Suddenly Oska said, "What's a Jew, Lelya?"

"It's a kind of people. There are all kinds. Like Russians, Americans and Chinese. And Germans, and Frenchmen. And there are Jews, too."

"Are we Jews? For real, or for make-believe? Give me your word of honour that we're Jews."

"My word of honour we are."

Oska was stunned by this discovery. He tossed about for quite some time. I was half-asleep when he whispered, trying not to wake me, "Lelya!"

"What?"

"Is Mamma a Jew, too?"

"Yes. Go to sleep."

As I drifted off to sleep I imagined myself speaking to the Latin teacher the next day and saying: "We've had enough of the old regime and being made to line up along the walls. You have no right to do that any more!"

We slept.

Papa and Mamma returned late that night. I woke up. As is often the case when people return late from visiting friends or the theatre, they were tired and irritable.

"That was an excellent cake," Papa was saying. "We never have anything like it. I wonder where all the money goes?"

I could hear Mamma's surprise at finding the butt of a home-rolled cigarette in the candle-holder on the piano. Papa went off to gargle. I heard the tinkle of the

glass stopper hitting the water pitcher. Suddenly my father called my mother in a voice that was unusually loud for such a late hour. Mamma asked him something. He sounded happy and excited. They had found my note, telling them the great news. I had written it before going to bed and had stuck it in the mouth of the pitcher.

They tiptoed into the nursery. Father sat down on the edge of my bed and put his arm around me. "You spell 'revolution' with an 'o', not an 'a'. Revolution. Ahh!" he said and tweaked my nose.

Just then Oska woke up. He had apparently been thinking of his great discovery all the time, even in his sleep.

"Mamma...."

"It's late. Go back to sleep."

"Mamma," he repeated, sitting up in bed, "is our cat a Jew, too?"

" 'GOD SAVE THE TSAR...' PASS THIS ON"

The next morning Annushka woke Oska and me up by singing: "Arise, ye workingmen, arise! Time for school!"

The workingmen (Oska and I) jumped out of bed. During breakfast I remembered the Latin pronouns I should have learned by heart: hie, haec, hoc....

Oska and I left the house together. It was warm. It was thawing. The cabbies' horses shook their feedbags. Oska, as usual, thought they were nodding to him. He was a very polite boy, and so he stopped beside each and every horse, nodded to it and said,

"Good morning, horsie!"

The horses said nothing. The cabbies, who knew Oska by now, said good morning for them. One horse was drinking from a bucket.

"Do you give him cocoa, too?" Oska wanted to know.

I dashed off to school. Nobody knew a thing yet. I would be the first to tell them. I whipped off my coat, burst into the classroom and shouted as I swung my satchel: "Fellows! The tsar's been overthrown!"

There was a moment of stunned silence.

Seize'em whom I had not noticed, had a fit of coughing and turned red in the face. He began shouting: "Are you crazy? I'll see to you later! Hurry! Time for chapel! Line up in pairs."

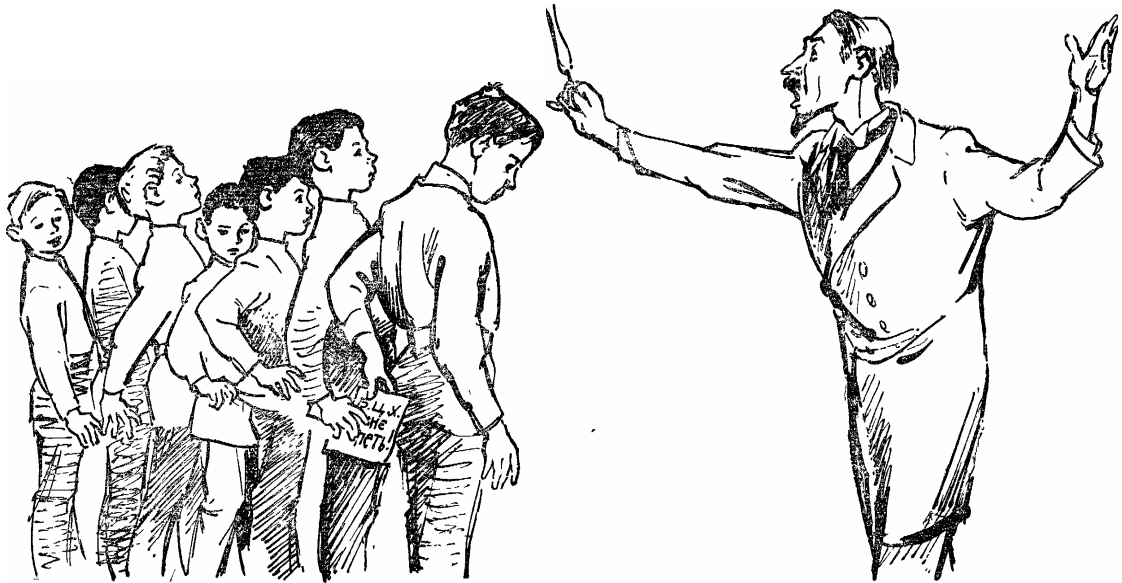
But the boys surrounded me. They jostled each other and snowed me under with questions.

The corridor rang from the sound of marching feet. The boys were being lined

up for morning prayers.

The principal, as dried-up, stiff and solemn as ever, strode along the corridor, his well-pressed legs flashing. The brass buckles jangled.

The priest, as black in his cassock as an ink-blot in a penmanship notebook, put on his chasuble. The service began.



We stood there whispering. The long grey lines were restless. Everyone seemed to be whispering.

"There's been a revolution in Petrograd."

"Is that up on top of the map, where the Baltic Sea is?"

"Yes. It's a big circle. You'd even find it on a blank map."

"The history teacher said there's a statue of Peter the Great there. And the houses are bigger than churches."

"I wonder what a revolution's like?"

"It's like the one in 1905 when we were at war with Japan. People demonstrated in the streets, and they had red flags, and the Cossacks and the police used their whips on them. And they shot them, too."

"What rats!"

"Golly, we're going to have a written test today. I'll probably get another 'D'. Ah, who cares!"

"Our Father who art in Heaven...."

"That takes care of the tsar. They sure got rid of him. It serves him right! Why'd he get us into the war?"

"Shut up! D'you think there'll be less homework now?"

"...For ever and ever. Amen."

"What grade's the heir in? I'll bet he never gets anything but 'A's'. He has nothing to worry about. No teacher'll ever give him a hard time."

"Don't worry. Things'll change now. He'll get his fair share of 'D's', too. It's about time he finds out what it's all about!"

"Wait! What's the genitive plural? Never mind, I'll copy it off someone."

A note was being passed along the rows. It had been written by Stepan Atlantis. (Later the note and Atlantis' name were both entered in the Ledger.) It read:

"Don't sing 'God save the tsar'. Pass this on."

"Today's chapter is from the Gospel according to Saint Luke."

A shy, freckle-faced third year boy read the parable in a faltering voice. The inspector prompted him, reading over his shoulder.

The concluding prayer followed: "...for the solace of our parents and the glory of our Church and Fatherland."

Now, in just another moment! We all tensed. The "ruling classes" cleared their throats. Harrumph!

The small, long-haired precentor of Trinity Church honked loudly as he blew his nose. At this a purple vein that resembled a big fat worm bulged in his scrawny neck. We always expected it to burst. The precentor stuffed his coloured handkerchief back into his back pocket through the slit in his worn, shiny frock coat. The tuning fork in his right hand seemed to fly up. A high metallic "ping" floated above the stuffy corridor. He fixed his greasy starched collar, extracted his skinny, plucked-looking neck from it, drew his little eyebrows together and sounded the key in a languorous voice:

"Laa.... Laa-aa."

We waited. The precentor rose up on tiptoe. His arms swooped up, raising us in song. He began to sing in a high-pitched, screechy voice that sounded like a finger being run down a window-pane: "God save the tsar...."

The boys were silent. Two or three hesitant voices joined in. Hefty, who was standing behind the singers, said, as if he were making a mental note of it: "Well, well...."

The voices wilted.

Meanwhile, the precentor faced the silent choir and waved his arms wildly. His sugary voice squawked: "Mighty ... and powerful, reign...."

We could contain our laughter no longer. It rose as a great squall. The teachers tried hard not to join us. The long corridor resounded with rolling peals of laughter.

The inspector chuckled. Seize'em's stomach jiggled. The first-year boys shrieked and giggled. The towering overgrown boys bellowed. The janitor

snickered. "Ha-ha ... ho-ho ... ho-ho-ho ... he-he-he ... ah-ha-ha...."

The one exception was the principal. He was as straight and stiff as ever, though paler than usual. "Silence!" he said and stamped his foot. Everything seemed squashed into silence beneath his gleaming boot.

At this point Mitya Lamberg, a senior and leader among the older boys, shouted: "Quiet! I don't have a very strong voice." And he started singing *The Marseillaise*.

"ON THE BARRICADES"

I was standing on my desk, making a speech. Two boys appeared from behind the brick stove at the far end of the room. It was the shopkeeper's son Baldin and the police officer's son Lizarsky. They always stuck together, reminding us of a boat and barge. Lizarsky, who was short and stocky and always swung his arms when he walked, would lead the way, towing lanky, dark-haired Baldin behind. Lizarsky came over to my desk and grabbed me by the collar.

"What are you yelling about?" He swung at me.

Stepan Gavrya, alias Atlantis, shouldered Lizarsky away. "What's it to you, you monarchist?"

"Who asked you? Sock'im, Baldy!"

Baldin was eating sunflower seeds indifferently. Someone standing in back of him sang a ditty:

*See the boat that tows a barge,
Goodness me!
On the barge are seeds so large,
Diddle-dee!*

Baldin shoved his shoulder into Stepan's chest. The usual muttered conversation followed:

"Who do you think you are?"

"That's none of your business."

"Take it easy."

"Who asked you?"

The fight that followed probably burst into flame from the sparks Baldin saw. A couple of other "monarchists" came to his aid. A second later it was a free-for-all. Not until the monitor shouted, "Ma'msele's coming!" did the two sides retreat to their desks. A truce was declared until the long recess.

THE LONG RECESS

It was a glorious day. It was thawing. Boys were playing mumbly-peg on the drying walks. A huge spotted pig was scratching its side on a post in the sun opposite school. Its black spots were like inkblots on a white piece of blotting paper. We poured out into the yard. There was a sea of sunlight and not a single policeman in sight.

"Everybody who's against the tsar, over here!" Stepan Gavrya shouted. "Hey, you monarchists! How many of you are there to a pound when you're dried?"

"Whoever's for the tsar, over here! Kill the bums!" Lizarsky screeched.

A moment later the air was full of snowballs flying back and forth. The battle raged. I was soon hit in the eye with such a hard-packed snowball it made me dizzy. I saw green and purple stars, but our side was winning. The "monarchists" had been forced back to the gate.

"Surrender!" we shouted.

They managed to get out of the yard. As we raced after them we fell into a trap.

A junior high school was located nearby. We had always been at war with the Juniors. They called us squabs and never missed a chance to pick a fight with us (nor did we). Our "monarchists", those traitors, had gone over to the Juniors, who did not know what the fight was all about, but fell on us anyway.

"Kill the squabs! Get the pigeons!" the horde whistled and shouted as it attacked.

"Wait!" Atlantis shouted. "Wait!"

Everyone stopped. He climbed onto a snowdrift, fell through it, climbed up again and took off his cap. "Listen, fellows, quit fighting. That's enough. From now on there's going to be, uh, what's the word, Lenny? Eternity? No. Fraternity! For everyone. And there won't be any more wars. What a life! We'll all be on the same side from now on."

He was silent for a moment, not knowing what else to say. Then he jumped down and went over to one of the Juniors. "Give me five," he said and shook the boy's hand.

"Hooray!" I shouted, surprising myself.

The boys began to cheer and laugh. Soon we were one happy crowd.

Then the schoolbell pealed angrily.

THE LATIN ENDING OF REVOLUTION

"Roachius is steaming in!" the monitor shouted and rushed back to his seat.

The door opened. We stood up noisily. The Latin teacher entered, bringing in the quiet of the deserted corridor. He went to the lectern and twirled his stringy, roach-like moustache until the tips bristled.

His gold pince-nez spurred the bridge of his nose and galloped down the rows until his eye came to rest on my swollen cheek. "What's that supposed to be?" His slim finger was pointing at me.

I rose, and in a dull, hopeless voice replied, "I hurt myself. I slipped and fell."

"So you fell, did you? I see.... Poor child. Well, Mister Revolutionary, march up to the front of the class. So! It's a real beauty. Have a look, gentlemen! So. What was the homework for today?"

I stood at attention in front of the lectern and said nothing. Roachius drummed his fingers on the top of a desk. My silence was anguished. It was full of despair.

"So. So you don't know. I gather you've had no time to look in to it. You were too busy making a revolution. Sit down. You've just earned yourself an 'F'."

An indignant murmur filled the classroom. His pen pecked at the ink in the inkwell, soared over the lectern like a hawk, peered down from above to find my name in the class journal and....

*When the next semester
Does stumble to an end,
The teacher will present me
With another "F", my friend.*

The "monarchists" in the last row behind the stove snickered. This was more than I could bear. I breathed heavily. The boys shuffled their feet. The teacher's knuckles rapped on the top of the lectern.

"Silence! What's going on here? Do you want to get reported again? We haven't been strict enough with you!"

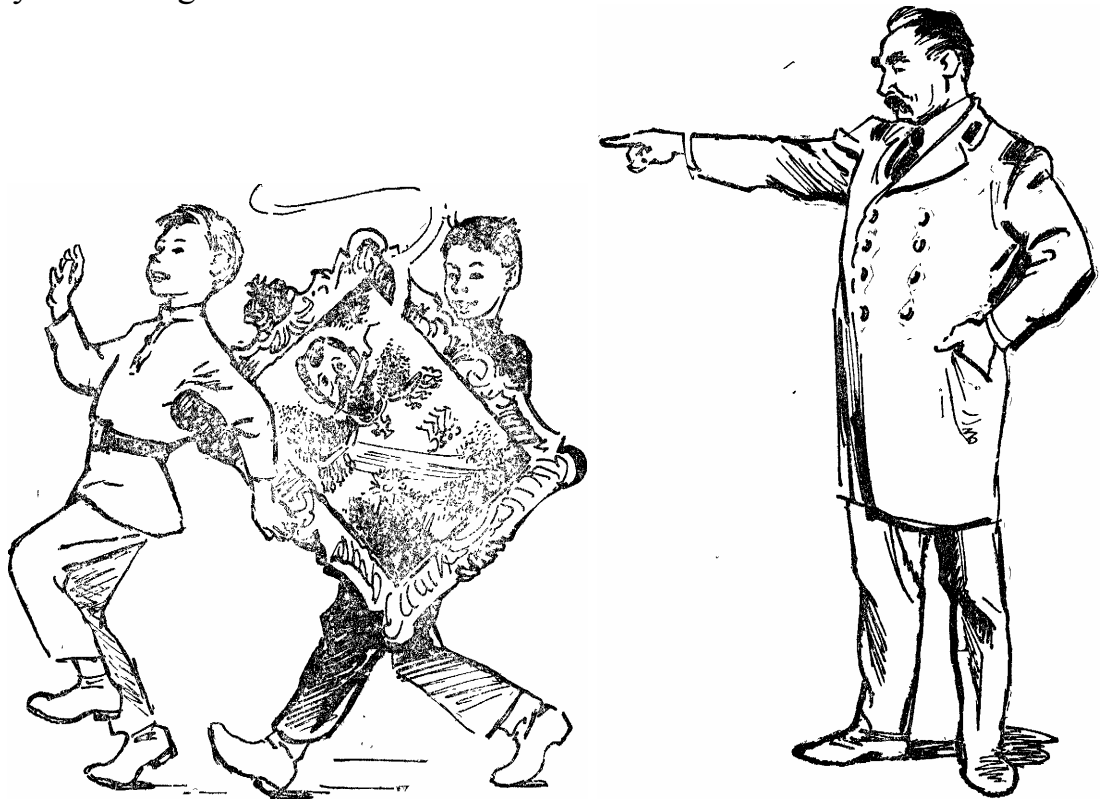
When the noise died down I said stubbornly, speaking through my tears, "But the tsar's been overthrown anyway."

NICHOLAS ROMANOFF, LEAVE THE CLASSROOM!

Our last lesson that day was nature study.

This subject was taught by our favourite teacher, Nikita Pavlovich Kamyshov, a jolly man with a long moustache. His classes were always interesting and full of

fun. He entered the room with a springy step, waved us down to our seats and said with a smile: "Well, my doves, what a situation, hm? There's been a revolution. That's really something."



This encouraged us, and we all began shouting at once.

"Tell us about it! Tell us about the tsar!"

"Shush, my doves!" he said, raising a finger. "Shush! Even though there's been a revolution, there must be silence above all. Fine. Secondly, though we are now on to the study of the solid-hoofed species, it is still too early to speak about the tsar."

Stepan Atlantis raised his hand. All eyes were on him. We expected him to oblige with a practical joke.

"What is it, Gavrya?"

"Someone's smoking in class."

"I've never known you to be a tattletale. All right, who has dared to smoke in class?"

"The tsar," Stepan said impudently.

"What? Who did you say?"

"The tsar's smoking. Nicholas II."

Indeed! There was a portrait of the tsar on the wall, and someone, apparently Stepan, had poked a hole in the corner of the tsar's mouth and stuck a lighted

cigarette in the hole.

The tsar was smoking. We all burst out laughing. The teacher joined us. Suddenly, he became very serious and raised his hand. The laughter died down.

"Nicholas Romanoff, leave the room!" he said solemnly. And so the tsar was banished from the classroom.

STEPAN, THE LIAISON OFFICER

There was a high fence between the yard of the Girls School and our school. There were cracks in the fence. During recess the boys would pass notes to girls through the cracks. The girls' teachers were always on the lookout to make sure that we did not come near the fence, but it didn't help anyway. Close ties existed between the two yards, and they were kept up through the years.

Once, when the senior boys were having a grand old time, they got hold of me during recess, swung me and tossed me over the fence into the girls' yard. The girls flocked around. I was so embarrassed I was ready to cry. Three minutes later their headmistress got me out of their clutches. She led me solemnly into our Teachers' Room. My appearance was rather bizarre, somewhat like that of Kostya Gonchar, the town fool who would deck himself out in anything gaudy that came to hand. There were flowers in my pocket, chocolate on my lips, a bright candy wrapper stuck in my belt, a pigeon's feather in my cockade, a paper devil on a string around my neck, and one trouser leg was saucily tied with a pink ribbon and bow. All of the boys, and even the teachers, nearly collapsed at the sight of me. I never went near the fence again from that day on. That was why, when the boys now picked me to be a delegate and go over to the girls' side, I remembered the candy wrapper, the headmistress and the pink bow, and flatly refused.

"Go on!" Stepan Atlantis said. "Why don't you want to? You're the best man for the job, being as you're so polite. Well, never mind, I'll go myself, it's easy. After all, somebody has to explain things to them."

And so Stepan climbed over the fence.

We all pressed close to the cracks.

The girls were running around, playing tag, shrieking and laughing loudly. Stepan jumped down into their yard. "Oh!" they cried, stood still for a moment and then rushed to the fence like chicks coming to a hen's clucking. They surrounded him. He saluted and introduced himself as follows: "Stepan Atlantis." Then he took his hand from his visor for a moment to wipe his nose. "You can call me Gavrya, but Stepan is better."

"Who does he think he is, climbing over the fence like that? Hooligan!" a

small girl named Foxy said, puckering her lips.

"I'm not a hooligan. I'm a delegate. I'll bet you're all still for the tsar, aren't you? Ha! What a bunch of ninnies!"

Then Stepan took a deep breath and made a long speech, carefully choosing his words, for he wanted to sound polite.

"Listen, girls! There was a revolution yesterday, and the tsar was booted out. I mean, kicked out. None of us sang 'God save the tsar' at prayers this morning, and we're all for the revolution. I mean, for freedom. We want to overthrow the principal, too. Are you for freedom or not?"

"What's it like?" Foxy asked.

"That means there won't be a tsar or a principal. They won't make us stand along the walls any more, and we'll elect whoever we want to be in charge and tell us what to do. It'll really be great! And we can hang out on Breshka Street. I mean, walk around there, whenever we want to."

"I guess I'm for freedom," Foxy drawled after some thought. "What about you, girls?"

The girls were now all for freedom.

THE PLOT

Stepan Atlantis came to see me late that evening. He came up the back stairs and called me out the kitchen. He looked very mysterious. Annushka was wiping the wet glassware. The glasses squeaked loudly. Stepan glanced at her, as if taking her into his confidence, and said,

"You know, the teachers want to get rid of Fish-Eye. Honest. I heard them talking about it. I was walking behind the history teacher and Roachius, and they were saying they'd report him to the committee. 'Pon my honour. You know what";

Tomorrow, when we go to that whad-diya-call-it, manifestation, when I raise my hand, we're all going to shout: 'Down with the principal!' Mind you don't forget I can't stay. I have to see the other fellows, and I'm dead beat. Well, reservoir!"* He turned at the door and said threateningly: "And if Lizarsky opens up his trap again, I'll settle his hash. See if I don't."

ON BRESHKA STREET

There was no school the next day. Both the Boys and the Girls schools had

joined the demonstration in town. The principal phoned in to say he would not be in due to a bad cold ... cough-cough!

Everything was so unusual, so new and so fascinating. We gathered for the demonstration. The teachers shook the older pupils' hands. They joked and talked with them as equals. The Clerks' Club band was blaring. The cream of our local society, portly officials of the Excise Tax Bureau, the tax inspector, the railroad officials, the thin-legged telegraph operators and postal clerks were all marching along in broken lines, vainly trying to keep in step. There were caps, cockades piping, tabs and silver buttons everywhere. Everyone was carrying a slip of paper with the words of *The Marseillaise* printed on it which had been handed out somewhere along the line. The officials, having donned their spectacles, peered at their slips as intently as if this was some piece of business correspondence and sang in joyless voices.

The mayor, who had already been deposed, appeared on the porch of the district council office. He was wearing a pair of rubbers over red-and white felt boots. The ex-mayor took off his hat and said in a hoarse and solemn voice:

"Ladies and gentlemen! There's been a revolution in Petrograd and all over Russia. His Imperial Majesty ... that bloody despot... has abdicated. All power has gone over to the Provisional Government. Long may it live! I, for one, *say*. hooray!"

The crowd cheered.

Atlantis shouted, "And down with the principal!"

But nothing came of this. The principal had not appeared, and Stepan's plan collapsed.

A group of teachers and the school inspector were arguing heatedly on the corner of Breshka Street. Stepan listened to what they were saying. The inspector was saying ponderously:

"The Committee of the Duma will review our petition this evening, and I believe the result will be favourable. Then we will show Mister Stomolitsky the door. The time of callous officialdom is over. Yes, indeed."

Stepan dashed back to where we were. The day suddenly seemed brighter, and the inspector suddenly seemed such a good fellow you'd think he had never put Stepan's name down in the Ledger.

More and more people were joining the ranks of the demonstrators. Workers of the lumber yards, the printshop, the bone-meal factory, mechanics from the railroad depot, plump bakers, broad-shouldered stevedores, boatmen and bearded peasants all dressed up in their Sunday best were marching along jubilantly.

The echo of the bass drum pounded against the walls of the granaries. The cheering rolled along the streets in a great, sweeping wave. The schoolgirls smiled

warmly. The soft breeze fingered the telegraph wires, strumming *The Marseillaise*. It was so good, so wonderful and exhilarating to breathe, to march along in an overcoat that was unbuttoned and flapping, against all the sacred school rules.

THE PRINCIPAL'S RUBBERS

The clock in the vestibule had long since struck nine, but still, lessons had not begun. The classrooms were churning and boiling. Amidst the general buzzing voices would bubble up and burst like soap bubbles. Seize'em was patrolling the corridor, chasing the boys back into the classrooms. There was a light square on the wall in the Teachers' Room where the tsar's portrait had hung. The teachers were walking up and down in tense silence, enveloped by clouds of cigarette smoke.

At last Atlantis, who was always in on everything, decided to find out what was up and went off to the Teachers' Room, supposedly to get a wall map. He was back in no time, and bursting with news. He did two somersaults, jumped onto the lectern, did a handstand there and, with his feet waving to and fro in the air, he astounded us with a joyous howl:

"Fellows! The Committee kicked the principal out!" Oh, joy! There was a wild slamming of desk tops, cheers and yelps. The commotion was ear-splitting.

Hefty, who was dizzy from joy, kept pounding the boy next to him over the head with his geometry book and shouting: "They've kicked him out! Kicked him out! Kicked him out! Hear that? They've kicked him out!"

Just then the heavy door opened at the end of the corridor into which glee waves of joy were pouring from every classroom, and a pair of highly-polish boots on a pair of unbending legs squeaked softly into the Teachers' Room. The teachers rose as the principal entered, although their usual greeting did not follow. Stomolitsky took instant notice of this. "Eh, what seems to be the matter, gentlemen?"

"The matter, Sir, lies in the fact that you ... but perhaps you had better read yourself," the inspector said and his beard rose and fell gently as he spoke. He handed the principal a sheet of paper as carefully as if he wished Stomolitsky sign something important.

The principal took the proffered sheet. One word stood out among all the rest and this was "Dismissal". However, he refused to accept defeat.

"Eh ... the District Board appointed me, and I am responsible to it alone," said in an icy voice. "And, furthermore, I shall report this unlawful action to Board immediately. And now," at this he clicked open the top of his gold pocket watch, "I

suggest you all go to your classes."

"What?" Kirill Ukhov, the history teacher, exclaimed and yanked at his angrily. "You.... You've been dismissed! It's something we all insisted on, and not a point that's up for discussion. Gentlemen! Say something! What the hell is this anyway!"

Boys were clustering in the doorway. Though they were dying of curiosity, they said nothing. Those in the back rows pressed forward, propelling those in the front through the door. As they stumbled into the Teachers' Room they straighter their jackets, fixed their belts and looked rather embarrassed. Stepan Gavrya elbowed his way through, looked at Ukhov with burning eyes and suddenly cried.

"That's right, Kirill Mikhailovich!" Then he lunged towards Stomolitsky "Down with the principal!"

A dead silence followed. Suddenly it was as if an avalanche had come crash down upon the Teachers' Room, crushing and submerging all in its wake.

"Down with him! Get out! Down with the principal! Hooray!"

The corridor echoed from the noise. Windows rattled. The entire build seemed to be shaking from the wild pounding of feet, the roaring and shouting.

For the first time in his life the principal seemed shaken and bent. Creases seemed to have suddenly appeared in his well-pressed trousers.

The inspector feigned concern. He cocked his eyes at the door politely and said,

"I think you'd better leave, Sir. I'm afraid we cannot guarantee your safety."

"You haven't heard the end of this yet!" the principal muttered and stalked out.

The bottom of his jacket caught on the door knob.

He hurried to his office, clapped on his cockaded cap and put on his overcoat on the run, so that his arms missed the armholes. He dashed outside. The janitor hobbled out onto the porch after him.

"Sir! You've forgotten your rubbers! Your rubbers. Sir!"

The principal did not turn back, his skinny legs took him across the muddy puddles, his shiny boots sinking into the snow. The janitor stood on the porch, holding the principal's rubbers and clucking his tongue:

"Tut-tut-tut! My-my! Good Lord! That's the revolution for you! Look at the principal go, and without his rubbers!" Then he chuckled. "See him skittering! A real gee-raffe he is. My-my! A body can't help laughing! Shake a leg! Looks just like one of them ostriches, he does."

The boys poured out onto the porch. They were laughing and shouting.

"Hey, watch him leg it! Bally-ho! Goodbye, Fish-Eye!"

A snowball hit his back.

"Whee! Keep on going! Jailer! Warden!"

It was enough to take your breath away. There was the principal, just think of it: the principal!—whom the boys but yesterday had to greet by standing stiffly at attention, before whom they had quaked and tipped their caps (always holding them by the visor!), whose office they had passed on tiptoe only—there was the principal, running away so shamefully, so helplessly and, to top it all, having left his rubbers behind!

They could see the teachers' pleased faces in the windows. The janitor scolded: "Quit the ruckus! Shame on you! And you being educated boys!"

Atlantis crept up behind him, snatched one of the principal's rubbers from him and sent it sailing after Stomolitsky. The boys roared. Then he stuck two fingers in his mouth and whistled shrilly, with a trill at the end. Only true pigeon fanciers knew how to whistle like that, and Stepan's tumbler pigeons were famous in town.

When we trooped noisily back to the classrooms, our faces flushed from excitement, the teachers scolded us half-heartedly, saying:

"That wasn't nice at all, gentlemen. Your behaviour was abominable. Don't you realize that?"

But we could see they were only saying that because they had to.

THE POPULAR ASSEMBLY ON THE LOGS

We called an emergency meeting on a pile of logs in the yard after school that day, and pupils of all the eight grades came to the popular assembly. We were going to elect delegates to the joint meeting of the Teachers' Council and the Parents Committee. The one item on the agenda was: "Relieving the principal his duties."

Mitya Lamberg chaired the meeting. He presided grandly on the logs and said,

"And now, gentlemen, present your candidates."

"Where are we supposed to present them?"

"Ha-ha-ha!" "Gentlemen! Nominate your candidates!"

"Hey, Martynenko! You nominate him one! Ho-ho!"

"Gentlemen! Let's have some order! After all, you're not a bunch of prim school boys. And let's have some quiet at a time like this!"

"Quit it, fellows!"

The noise finally died down. The election was set into motion. Mitya Lamb Stepan Atlantis and Shura Gvozdilo, a fourth-grade boy, were elected.

"Any more questions?"



"Yes!" Atlantis scrambled up to the top of the pile. "Listen, fellows. It serious matter, and no fooling. We've got to make it stick and present Fish-Eye with all our complaints. And there's something else. There should be delegates from both sides, and no monkey-business about it!"

"That's right, Stepan! Delegates from both sides!"

"Three cheers for the delegates!"

As the boys tossed Stepan into the air a varied, assortment of things dropped of his pockets. They included some popgun corks, cartridges, an oilcake, a slug of lead and a pocket edition of *The Adventures of Nat Pinkerton*. Mitya pounded an old pot which had served as the chairman's bell and was now a drum. The boys carried the delegates out through the gate on their shoulders. Everyone cheered.

The sun, tired from its steep climb during the day, had stopped to rest on school roof which was wet from the melted snow, shiny and slippery. The slipped, burned the windows opposite, plopped into a large puddle and winked at the merry crowd of boys in a rainbow of colours.

"FOR THE SOLACE OF OUR PARENTS"

The indignant principal had one last resort: he went to the Parents Committee for help.

This was not an easy thing for him to do, since he considered the boys' parents

enemies of the state and had always forbidden the teachers to become friendly them. As far as he was concerned, parents existed only as people to whom he addressed reminders of non-payment of tuition fees or notices which were intended to draw their attention to the poor behaviour of their sons. He regarded any interference in school affairs on their part as a violation of its sanctity. If it were up to him, he would have thrown out the phrase "for the solace of our parents" from the morning prayer.

However, this was no time for settling scores. The principal trudged over to see the veterinary, Shalferov, Chairman of the Parents Committee, who was known in town as the horse doctor.

The principal arrived during Shalferov's office hours. The horse doctor was so surprised to see him that he forgot to offer Stomolitsky a chair. He hastily wiped his hand on a greenish smock that was covered with unsightly spots and then offered it to the principal who was a dandy and a stickler for cleanliness. The vet's hand smelled of fresh milk, stables and something nauseatingly acrid. The principal felt his stomach jump, but he shook the proffered hand readily.

They conversed as they stood in the cold foyer. It was cluttered with milk cans, large bottles, wilted rubber plants and geranium pots. A cat was digging a hole in a box of sand in the corner. Never realizing that it was witnessing an historical event involving the fall of the principal, the cat raised its tail and held it out stiffly.

The horse doctor listened to the ashen-faced principal's story and promised his support. The principal thanked him humbly. The horse doctor was hard-pressed for time, for a cow was bellowing out in the yard, and he had to give it an enema. Shalferov suggested that the principal speak to the Secretary of the Parents Committee.

THE PRINCIPAL AND OSKA

My father was Secretary of the Parents Committee. The principal felt very awkward about asking him for favours, since but a short while before my father had applied for the position of school doctor when there had been a vacancy, and the principal had written the following on my father's application:

"We would prefer a doctor who is not of the Jewish faith."

Father had just returned from the hospital where he had been operating. He was washing up and gargling. The water bubbled in his throat, so that it seemed that Papa had come to a boil.

The principal awaited him in the parlour.

Goldfish were swimming in the fishbowl, dragging their long, filmy tails along

the bottom. One fish whose head looked like an aviator's helmet (for it had big bulging eyes), swam right up to the glass. The fish's insolent orb stared at the principal. Recalling the unpleasant nickname given to him by the boys, he turned away in annoyance.

Just then the parlour door opened and Oska entered, pulling along a large and mournful hobby horse. The horse had long since lost its youth and its tail. It got stuck in the doorway and very nearly fell apart.

Then Oska noticed the principal. He paused to look at him, then came closer and said, "Are you a patient?"

"No. I've come on business."

"Oh, I know! You're the horse doctor. You smell like a horse doctor. Don't you? You cure cows and cats, and dogs, and colties, and all the rest. I know. Can you cure my horse? He has a train engine in his stomach. It got in, but it can't get out."

"You're mistaken, child," Stomolitsky said huffily. "I'm not a veterinary, I'm the principal of the Boys School."



"Oh." Oska gasped respectfully. He stared hard at the principal. "Are you really the principal? You scared me. Lelya says you're very strict, even the teachers are scared of you. What's your name? Snail?... No. Crab?... I know! Shark-Eye!"

"My name is Stomolitsky," the principal said sourly. "And what is your

name?"

"Oska. But why does everybody call you Shark-Eye?"

"Don't ask stupid questions. Why don't you tell me ... ahem ... whether you know how to read. You do? Well, then tell me ... mm ... ah.... Can you tell me where the Volga flows. Do you know the answer?"

"Sure. The Volga flows into Saratov. Now see if you know this: if an elephant and a whale have a fight, who'll win?"

The principal was forced to admit that he did not know.

Oska consoled him by saying, "Nobody knows. Papa doesn't know, and the soldier doesn't know. But why do they call you Shark-Eye? Was that your name when you were little?"

"That is quite enough! Why don't you tell me your horse's name?"

"Horse. Everybody knows that. Horses don't have last names."

"You're wrong. For instance, Alexander the Great had a horse that was called Busifal."

"And you're Fish-Eye, aren't you? Not Shark-Eye. I got mixed up. But I said it right now, didn't I?"

Papa entered.

"What a bright boy you have!" the principal said smiling angelically as he bowed.

FATHERS, DADS, AND OLD MEN

Whirr! Buzz!

The ventilator in the Teachers' Room sounded like a huge fly on a windowpane. It was suffocating in the heated room. Now and then a board of a desk in one of the dark, deserted classrooms would creak. The clock in the downstairs hall ticked loudly.

"I will now call to order the joint meeting of the Parents Committee and the Teachers' Council."

The Parents Committee was seated at a large table. Facing them in a row were the teachers. Mitya Lamberg and Shura Gvozdilo huddled together at the far end of the table. Shura seemed lost. Lamberg, who was older and bigger, was trying not to look too awed. The inspector had barred Stepan Atlantis from the meeting, saying, "You can expect anything from that rascal. I wouldn't trust him for a minute."

"I'll be very quiet," Stepan had promised.

"Show him out!" the inspector had said to the janitor.

"Out you go, my boy." The janitor had pushed the protesting Stepan lightly.

"Some delegate! Troublemaker!"

Stepan had been deeply hurt. "Well, don't blame me if nothing comes of this. Reservoir. Adieu."

At the very outset of the meeting the lights went out. It was a usual power failure. The Teachers' Room was plunged into darkness, Mitya stuck his hand into his pocket to get his matches, but suddenly realized that a non-smoking schoolboy was not supposed to have matches in his pocket. The janitor brought in a kerosene lamp with a round green shade that resembled a parachute. The lamp was hung over the table. It swayed slightly, casting flickering shadows that made the noses of the people around the table now grow very long, now become very short.

The inspector was the first speaker. He spoke smoothly and wittily, and his forked beard, so like a snake's forked tongue, bobbed up and down craftily.

The fathers of the boys who lived on farmsteads were breathing heavily. Their eyes drooped as Romashov droned on. The long-haired priest put a strand of hair behind his ear, the better to hear him. The tax collector wiped his glasses intently, as if he were going to examine each and every one of the inspector's words through his spectacles. The shopkeeper bent one plump finger after another meaningfully, in time to the inspector's words.

Gutnik, the fat miller and a member of the Duma, spoke up for the principal. "How can you teachers take things into your own hands like this? Let me tell you, it's not right. You should have asked the District Board first. Stomolitsky was always a man for law and order. We knew that when he was in charge, everything was as it should be. That's why he should stay on. And I have a feeling that that's just how things will be. Besides, these are troubled times. It's like everything was on fire all over. And the boys'll start acting up. Aren't I right?"

The parents began to nod in agreement. The men were afraid to let their sons have too much freedom. If you let the reins go just a little, you'd never again be able to manage that crowd of pigeon-fanciers, dare-devils and loafers.

THE PRINCIPAL'S LEDGER

Nikita Pavlovich Kamyshov, the geography and science teacher, jumped to his feet excitedly. Mitya and Shura looked at their favourite teacher with hope. He was very intent and spoke heatedly. Every sentence he uttered was a line in Fish-Eye's unwritten Ledger.

"Gentlemen! What's the matter? The tsar's been dethroned, but we ... we can't even get rid of the principal! You're the parents! Your children, your sons came here to this hateful place, to get an education. But what sort of an education could

they get? What, I ask you, could they get here, these children, when we teachers, we grown-up people, were suffocating? There was no air to breathe. It was disgraceful! We had a regular barracks-room atmosphere! Why, if a boy was seen wearing a soft collar he was made to stay after school for eight hours! My God! Now, when the air has become cleaner all over Russia, we here, in our house, are afraid to open a window and air the premises!" He yanked at his long, drooping moustache and dashed breathlessly out of the room.

It became very still.

The principal, who had been sitting unobtrusively in a corner, broke the quiet with his flat voice. He had turned green from the light of the lampshade and from bile. He tried to explain away Kamyshov's accusations by saying: "He's trying to get even. There's the law ... and discipline ... my duty ... the Board."

He was interrupted by Robiiko, a huge, dark-haired man, as tall as the freight trains he drove were long. The trainman crashed his fist down on the table and said: "What's the use of all this talk? If there's been a revolution, that means these are revolutionary times! We go straight on through without any stops. As for the principal, we haven't yet seen anything good except bad from him. And I say we ought to ask the boys. Let their delegates have the floor. Otherwise, what was the use of electing them?"

Mitya rattled off the speech he had learned by heart.

"And what do you say?" the chairman said, turning to Shura Gvozdilo.

Shura jumped up. His arms were plastered to his sides, as if he were reciting a lesson.

The principal's fishy eyes stared at him with loathing.

Shura cocked a wary eye at Stomolitsky. Who could tell? Perhaps he would remain at his post and get even later. Shura swallowed the lump in his throat. His heart sank, all the way down to his heels, but just then Mitya squeezed his foot so hard between his own heels that Shura's heart bounded back into place again. Shura tossed his head, swallowed hard again and suddenly felt better.

"We're all for down with the principal!" he shouted.

Someone had jarred the lamp. It was swaying. Once again the shadows began to move. They were shalving their heads reproachfully. Noses began growing longer and getting shorter again, and the principal's dejected nose seemed the longest of all.

PRESENCE OF MIND

The meeting dragged on far into the night. At last, the following resolution was

drawn up:

"Juvenal Bogdanovich Stomolitsky is to be relieved of his post as principal of the Boys School. Nikolai Ilyich Romashov, the school inspector, is to be temporarily appointed principal until the District Board confirms his appointment."

The former principal left the meeting in silence without saying goodbye to anyone. Romashov fluffed his beard with a victorious air. The new principal's pleased beard no longer looked like a snake's forked tongue but, rather, like a chunk of bread with a dent in the middle.

Shura had become much bolder. He mentioned setting up a student council. The flame in the lamp leaped from the sudden burst of laughter that followed. Someone even slapped his back.

"Ah, it's good to be young! Such spit and fire!"

"Delegates of those snot-nosed babies! Ha-ha-ha!"

Shura was embarrassed. He sniffled and rubbed his belt buckle.

The discussion passed on to another matter. The parents began to yawn, covering their mouths with their hands. Shura could barely keep his eyes open. The green parachute-lamp floated above the table. The flame hissed faintly, casting ragged shadows. Waves of heat rose from the lamp glasses. He was dying to sleep. To top it all, the ventilator whirled on and on monotonously.

The principal had been kicked out. Shura felt he had accomplished his mission, but the teachers, parents and the new principal were still debating, and he felt it was impossible to simply get up and leave. That was when he construed a very adult sentence about his presence no longer being required and, therefore, it being possible for him to leave the meeting. Shura rose. He opened his mouth to say all this when he realized he had forgotten the first word of the sentence. As he searched for it he forgot all the others. The words seemed happy to have escaped from his drowsy mind and pranced about in front of his sleepy eyes. "Presence", a very adult word, had just donned a tunic with gold buttons and climbed into the lamp glass insolently. The flame stuck its tongue out at him, and "possible" started tossing the dot over the "i" at him. It was attached to a long rubber band and bounced off his head just like the paper balls that Chi Sun-cha sold at the market.

"What is it you wish to say?" the chairman inquired.

All eyes were on Shura.

He tugged at the bottom of his jacket in despair and said: "May I leave the room?"

SEIZE'EM ENDS THE DAY

Shura went outside. The sky was as black as a blackboard. A cloud-rag had wiped it clean of all the star designs. A dense black silence had engulfed the town. For the first few moments after leaving the Teachers' Room he stumbled about in the dark like a fly in an inkblot. At last, he made out the shape of a human figure.

"Is that you, Shura? I'm frozen stiff."

"Atlantis!"

"Well? What happened?"

Shura dragged on each word to make an impression. "Nothing special, really. Naturally, we got what we wanted. Fish-Eye got the sack. The inspector's taking his place for the time being."

"Wait a minute! What about the student council?"

"Ha! Anything else you'd like? They laughed their heads off when I mentioned it."

"What? Then what did you get? That's no revolution! They kicked out the principal and put the inspector in his place. Ah!" Stepan disappeared in the dark. Shura Gvozdilo shrugged and headed home. The night watchman's clapper, that wooden cuckoo of all provincial nights, sounded in the stillness. Soon the parents and teachers trudged home across the dark square.

Seize'em was the last to leave. He had stayed on in order to enter Lamberg and Gvozdilo's names in the Black Book—just in case. And so that memorable day came to a close with the Ledger and Seize'em's spindly signature.

REFORMING THE OLD SCHOOL MARKS

A new portrait was hung in the Teachers' Room. It was a portrait of Alexander Kerensky. His hair was cut in a short brush, and the tabs of his wing collar stood out stiffly.

The teachers pledged allegiance to the Provisional Government at a special service. The general morning prayers were discontinued. Instead, a short prayer was read in each classroom before lessons began each morning. Finally, the liberal-minded new principal took a bold step and did away with the old system of grading our work.

"All these 'F's', 'D's' and 'A-minuses' are unpedagogical," Romashov said, addressing the Parents Committee.

From that day on the teachers no longer gave us "F's" and "A's". They now wrote "Poor" instead of "F", "Unsatisfactory" instead of "D", "Satisfactory" instead of "C", "Good" instead of "B" and "Excellent" instead of "A". Then, in order to keep up the idea of pluses and minuses, they began writing "Very good", "Not

quite satisfactory", "Nearly excellent", etc. Roachius was very dissatisfied with the new system of grading and once wrote "Very poor, with two minuses" on Hefty's test paper. This was also the mark he gave him for the term.

"If 'Poor' is an 'F'," Hefty mused, "then the grade he gave me for Latin this term is someplace way down the line. Probably a 'Z'. What if it's even worse than that?"

THE DARLING OF THE LADIES' COMMITTEE

The plot our house was on belonged to a large grain company. A winnower was forever whirring under an overhang. Golden dunes of wheat rose on canvas spread out on the ground, and the broad-shouldered scales would jerk their iron shoulders like a person who was trying to scratch his back unobtrusively. All day long women were busy patching canvas sacks in the yard, sewing with long needles as they sang mournful songs of love and parting.

One of the sack-menders was taken on as a cook for the family of a company employee. The cook had a son named Arkasha, who attended primary school. Arkasha was small for his age and so full of freckles his face looked like a piece of canvas covered with spilled grains of wheat. He was a very bright boy and wanted very much to go on to high school.

There was a Ladies' Charity Committee in our town, and the lady Arkasha's mother worked for belonged to it. At her urging the Committee decided to sponsor the gifted boy. That was how Arkasha Portyanko came to be a scholarship pupil in my grade, having passed the entrance examination with flying colours.

He was a very serious and kind-hearted boy, and he and I became the best of friends. He was not a quiet boy, but his mild pranks and jokes were quite unlike the rough play of his classmates. He was an honour pupil, and as each term ended he would take his excellent report card home to his mother in the kitchen. There was a line marked "Parent's signature" at the bottom, and his mother would sign it laboriously and with great pride, placing a dot at the end of her name as reverently as if she were lighting a votive candle in church.

PLUS MINUS LUCY

All the boys in my class knew that Arkasha was in love. The blaring formula of his love appeared regularly on the blackboard: "Arkasha + Lucy = !!" Lucy was the daughter of the wealthy chairwoman of the Ladies' Committee. When Arkasha's mother discovered whom her son had a crush on she shook her head. "Good Lord!

What a girl you've chosen! Have a look at yourself! You'll be the death of me yet!"

However, Lucy liked Arkasha very much. He would meet her in the arbour and they would read together. The sun shining through the leaves showered warm bits of its confetti on them. One day Arkasha brought Lucy a bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley.

At Christmas Lucy's mother had a party for her. Lucy invited Arkasha without having asked her mother's permission to do so. Arkasha set out for the party in his well-brushed, well-pressed school uniform. He entered the brightly-lit hall and was imagining the delights that awaited him when Lucy's mother suddenly blocked his way. She was a tall woman with rustling skirts and seemed very much disturbed to have discovered a cook's son about to attend her daughter's party.

"Come back some other time, child," she said in a sugary voice, "and use the back stairs. Lucy's busy. She can't see you now. Here are some sweets for you and your mother."

Arkasha did not see Lucy again after that. He missed her very much. He looked wan and began slipping in his studies.



In February of 1917, soon after the revolution, a portly gentleman in a fine, fur-lined coat was speaking animatedly to a crowd of people on Troitskaya Square, saying that now there were no more masters and no more slaves, that from now on everyone was equal. Arkasha believed every word of what he said, for it seemed to him that since a wealthy man was saying there would be no more masters, it must be so. That was when he decided to write Lucy a letter. I found it in the Ledger several years later together with a single dried lily-of-the-valley.

THE LETTER

"My dearest sweetheart Lucy,

"Since there has now been an overthrow of the tsarist regime, it means everybody is equal and free. There are no more masters, and nobody has a right to insult me and send me packing from a Christmas party like then. I miss you so

much. My mother says I even lost weight. I don't go to the skating rink any more, but not because I'm jealous, as Lizarsky says, watching him and you skating together. How do you like that, he says. To hell (scratched out) To blazes with him. I'm not one bit jealous. He got what was coming to him, because he's a monarchist (that means he's for the tsar), and that's why he's so mad. And now, dear Lucy, you and I can be like a brother and a sister, that is, if you want to. That's because there was a revolution and we're equals now. Actually, though, you're a hundred times better than I am. I can't tell you how much I miss you. My word of honour. I keep thinking about you when I do my homework, and even when I sleep I see you in my dreams. Just as clear as day. We had the word 'lucid' in spelling, and I wrote 'Lucy'. You spend all your time with Petya Lizarsky. He's the one who cribs his math from me and then says he solved the problem himself. And he holds your arm. I'm not one bit jealous, though. It's strange, though, because you're so smart, and pretty, and good, and intelligent, Lucy, and there you are, walking out, arm-in-arm with a monarchist. There's liberty, fraternity and equality now, so that no one will be angry at you if you go out with me. I won't ever say anything about you going out with Petya, because that was during the tsar's reign and three hundred years of the autocracy.

"My mother and I have never been very happy. My greatest joy was the revolution and you, dear Lucy. And I never cried like I did that day of your party.

"I finally decided to write to you, though it means I have no pride. If you haven't forgotten me and want to be friends again, write me a note. It'll be the happiest day of my life. . "This flower is from *that* bouquet.

"Yours truly,

"Arkasha Portyanko, 3rd grade.

"P.S. Please excuse the blots. And please tear up this letter."

MERRY MONOKHORDOV

The algebra teacher had a very strange last name: Monokhordov. He had fiery red hair and huge round jowls, which earned him his nickname, Red Hippo.

He was forever giggling, and this constant merriment was weird and impossible to understand.

"He-he-he!" he would giggle shrilly. "He-he-he! You don't know a thing. Here, he-he-he ... you should have written a plus sign, not a minus ... he-he-he.... That's why I've ... he-he-he ... given you ... he-he-he ... an 'F'."

Arkasha had taken out the letter he had written and was reading it under his desk. He was so engrossed that he did not see Monokhordov creep up on him.

Arkasha jumped, but it was too late. The teacher's thick fingers, covered generously with red hairs, closed on the letter.

"Ha-ha-ha! A letter! He-he, it's not sealed. This should be very, very interesting... he-he ... I'd like to know what you've been doing ... he-he ... during my class!"

"Please give it back!" Arkasha shouted, shaking visibly.

"Oh, no ... he-he-he. I'm sorry, but... he-he ... this is my trophy."

A reddish giggling filled the classroom. Monokhordov went back to the lectern and pored over the letter. A boy he had called on and had forgotten all about stood by the blackboard unhappily. His fingers were full of chalk dust. The teacher was busy reading.

"He-he-he ... very amusing....," he said as he came to the end. "Rather interesting. A letter ... he-he ... to his lady-love. I will read it aloud ... he-he-he ... as a lesson to you all."

"Read it! Read it!" everyone shouted excitedly, drowning out Arkasha's desperate pleas.

Monokhordov kept stopping every now and then to get the giggles out as he read the letter addressed to Lucy aloud from beginning to end. The boys yowled. Arkasha was as white as a sheet. He had never been so humiliated in his life.

THE FLOWER IN THE LEDGER

"You're starting young, Portyanko ... he-he ... very young." Arkasha knew that he could never send Lucy the defiled letter. All the lofty words he had used and which had caused such ribald laughter now seemed stupid to him, too. However, the terrible hurt he felt made him say in a very quiet and menacing voice:

"Please give me my letter."

The boys stopped laughing instantly.

"Oh, no," Monokhordov chuckled. "This'll go into the Ledger ... he-he-he."

Then Arkasha exploded. "Don't you dare! You've no right to!" he screamed and stamped his feet. "Reading somebody else's letter's the same as stealing!"

"Get out! This minute!" Monokhordov bellowed and his fat jowls shook. "Don't you ever forget that you're a charity boy. You'll fly out of here ... he-he ... like a balloon."

The dried lily-of-the-valley cracked faintly as the hard covers of the class journal snapped shut over it. Later, the new principal gave Arkasha a dressing down.

"You scoundrel," he said softly. "How dare you talk to your elders like that?"

I'll expel you, you brat. You'll end your days at hard labour, you ingrate. Just who do you think you are? Hm?"

Arkasha was again reminded that he was a charity boy, that he was only there because of the kindness of others, and that the revolution had nothing to do with anything. There had to be order, above all, and he, Arkasha, would be expelled in no time if this order were disturbed. Arkasha's name was entered in the Ledger. He was left after school for two hours. In the end, what he gathered was that the world was still the same old place and that it was still divided into the rich and the poor.



